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EVERYONE'S HISTORY OF FRENCH LITERATURE

WITH 111 ILLUSTRATIONS
AND PRACTICAL INFORMATION
FOR READING AND LEARNING



LIBRAIRIE HACHETTE
79, BOULEVARD SAINT-GERMAIN, PARIS
LONDRES, 18, KING WILLIAM STREET, STRAND

1920

FOREWORD

The purpose of the present booklet, written primarily for the benefit of British and American readers, is to explain to them the development of French Literature and to bring them, through that literature, to a better understanding of France herself. The writer's aim and purpose has been, therefore, to bind up the history of literature with the history of thought and manners, as embodying the very expression of the French genius and French society.

For this purpose it was necessary in the first place to trace out accurately the uninterrupted flow of literary productions in France, making careful note of its successive phases and principal channels. Hence the special attention paid to the division into the various chapters, each of which corresponds either to some definite period, or to one of the aspects of the literature of that period. For the same reason the literary currents have been linked up with the general history of the country.

It should be borne in mind, however, that the literature of a country as a whole is made up of a multitude of original writings worthy of being read for the sake of their intrinsic merit, whether in point of matter or of form, for the store of knowledge they afford the mind, for the enjoyment to be derived from their perusal. It will be found, then, that in this little volume, designed as a sort of introduction, a preparation for the study of the French writers, care has been taken to make the reader acquainted with all essential information about them before he turns to their writings. Of these, moreover, he will find mentioned the most important, the most characteristic in relation to the writer's work as a whole and to the age in which he lived.

With this object in view, as well as to assist the reader in making his choice, a table has been appended, corresponding to the various chapters in the book itself, and pointing out not only the writings it is essential to read, but also the handiest editions or collections in which those writings are to be found.

The publishers, in all cases when no name is mentioned, are "Librairie Hachette", who are bringing out the present volume.

F. R.

Paris, March 1st 1920.

P. S. I hereby wish to thank Mr. C. Heywood for the assistance his knowledge of both French and English enabled him to give me in writing this book.

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HISTORY OF FRENCH LITERATURE

PRELIMINARY CHAPTER

THE ORIGINS OF THE FRENCH LANGUAGE.

THE TROUBADOURS.

1. Formation of the French Language : *Langue d'oc* and *Langue d'oïl*.

The French language arose directly out of the Latin, as did the Italian and the Spanish : more than nine tenths of the French words are of Latin origin. Their present form is the result of alterations that have come about in accordance with the law of the least effort. The French words are shorter than the Latin words to which they owe their existence : for instance *sacramentum* gave *sagrament* (9th century), *sacrement* (11th cent.) and *serment* (early 15th cent.); they are also less sonorous,

Nor is the grammar less Latin in character than the vocabulary, as is shown by the study of low Latin, i. e. of the Latin written in the 6th and 7th centuries of the Christian era. Where French differs most from Latin is in the order of the words. For the inversive or ascending construction of old Latin, French has substituted the logical order of the words : it proceeds from the subject, the starting-point of the discourse, to the object, which is its goal, by way of the verb. This is the analytical order, as used in reasoning, deliberately substituted for the synthetic, which is the order followed by the imagination and sensibility. The French language thus exhibits a constant tendency to make clearness the first and foremost of its characteristic beauties, and so thoroughly has it succeeded in this, that it has deserved to be called "the only language having a straightforwardness attached to its genius" (Rivarol).

The Gauls, conquered by Cæsar, had the civilisation and the language of the Romans forced upon them. The Franks, victorious with Clovis, who defeated the last of the Roman generals, accepted both the one and the other; they did little more than add a few hundreds of words to the Gallo-Roman form of speech, in which moreover a few Celtic words survived. Thus, by almost imperceptible degrees, was formed an intermediary or transitional idiom, the Romance language, the oldest texts of which to have come down to us belong to the 8th century (the *Glossaire de Cassel* and the *Glossaire de Reichenau*, containing the translation into Romance of Latin and Teutonic

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words), to the 9th century (the *Serments de Strasbourg*), to the 10th (*Cantilène de Sainte Eulalie*, comprising 25 assonant verses, *Vie de Saint Léger*, 240 verses), and to the 11th century (*Vie de Saint Alexis*, 205 verses).

From the 9th to the 14th century, the Romance, which had become the national idiom of the whole of Gaul, branches out into dialects of the *langue d'oc* and dialects of the *langue d'oïl*. These several dialects persist side by side in feudal France until one of them, belonging to the *langue d'oïl* — the dialect of the Ile de France, or *Français* — eventually prevails over the rest, reducing them to the condition of *patois* absorbs them more or less and undergoing a progressive transformation in the course of the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries, becomes at the beginning of the 17th century modern French proper, with all its essential characteristics, as it is spoken and written at the present day.

2. Poetry of the *Langue d'oc* : the Troubadours.

The history of French literature begins with the Romance period, and the earliest manifestations of the national genius in a literary form occurred in the *langue d'oc*. The South of France, indeed, is both rich and fertile. In this part of the country, the Roman influence had been felt more deeply and more lastingly than in the North. It had suffered less from the invasions, one of which, that of the Arabs (1) at the beginning of the 8th century, had exerted a fortunate influence upon it, for the Arabs were the intermediaries between the East and the West. In consequence of this, Southern France preserved a brilliant civilisation, its language developed rapidly and many poets — troubadours, as they were called — sprang up as early as the 9th century.

Their verses, presumably composed under the influence of the Latin poets of the decadence — of Fortunatus more particularly — were intended to charm the small Courts of the Midi and fully justify the name of *courtois* (courtly) poetry that has been bestowed upon them. More than half these poets were of noble birth and would appear to have given the tone to the rest. Such were Guillaume de Poitiers (1087-1127); Bertrand de Born, seigneur de Hautefort; Jauffre Rudel, prince de Blaye; Alphonse d'Aragon, etc. Among the commoners, Bernard, styled de Ventadour, is the most accomplished writer of songs belonging to the Middle Ages. A certain familiarity sprang up, moreover, between these wandering minstrels who went from court to court and the high and mighty lords who honoured them with their

(1) It will be remembered that Charles Martel arrested their progress at Poitiers 732, and that Charlemagne drove them from the South of France.

hospitality or their rivalry. The noble ladies themselves were far from insensible to their songs and to their homage, nor were they above entering the poetical lists against them, at times, and arbitrating solemnly, when occasion offered, upon their amatory debates. Nay, this gracious and accidental intervention on their part gave birth to the now discredited legend of the "Courts of Love". To their influence was due the development of that cult of woman so conspicuous in northern literatures, together with the doctrine of chivalrous love — that *ars amandi* of which Petrarch was the most illustrious exponent.

The principal lyrical productions of the troubadours are the *canson* or *chanson d'amour*; the *sirventès* or *poème servant*, the inspiration of which is satirical, warlike or elegiac; and the *tenson*, born of a poetical dispute between two characters. To be further mentioned, among the secondary styles, are the *aubade*, the *sérenade*, the *pastourelle* and the *ballade*.

The chief merit of the troubadours lies in the form of their songs: rich rhymes, stanzas of a diversified construction, an intricate and learned science of language and rhythm. They really represent the earliest effort of literary art in France. And this literature was of unheard of fecundity. It is the custom to-day to refer to it as "provençale". Yet Provence was but one province of its realm. It flourished also in Auvergne, Limousin, Gascony and Languedoc. A list has been drawn up of 400 troubadours, some two hundred of whom enjoyed a meritable celebrity in their time. But this *courtois* poetry had not struck deep roots among the people, and it lacked a great poet, such as might have caused the southern genius to attain its full efflorescence. Thereby, as well as by the political disasters that befell the Midi in 13th century, after the crusade against the Albigeois, is to be explained the rapid decline of the poetry of the troubadours in the country of its origin (1).

(1) The 19th century has seen a revival of the literature in *langue d'oc*, by the poetical association of the "*félibrige*", founded in 1854, with which is associated the illustrious name of the great poet Frédéric Mistral (1830-1914), the author of *Mireio*.

THE HEROIC INSPIRATION IN THE LITERATURE OF THE MIDDLE AGES

1. The Chansons de Geste.

The "Chansons de geste" (Songs of High Deeds) are national epics. The oldest date from the second half of the 11th century. They were long considered to have originated in a previous folklore that was either lost, or did not reach its full development. According to this theory, from the 10th century onwards the «trouvères» to whom these primitive songs, or cantilenas, had been handed down, co-ordinated and expanded them, and by the process of editing and remodelling, composed the "chansons de geste" in the form in which they have come down to us. A new theory, however, formed by M. Joseph Bédier, maintains that the "chansons de geste" do not date back beyond the 11th century, that they came into being round the shrines marking the chief stages of the great pilgrimages, that they are the work of the "jongleurs" who wrote them in collaboration with the clerks and monks to attract and detain the pilgrims, that they are therefore literary productions just like any others and that the versions we possess are either the original ones or versions differing but very little from the originals.

The first period extends to the close of the 12th century : it is the golden age of these early epics. The songs of this period are comparatively short; they are written in lines of ten syllables, divided into couplets or "laisses" and assonant, i. e. terminating in an imperfect rhyme constituted by an identity of sound in the accentuated vowels (e. g. visage, arme).

The recital of the "chansons de geste", proper to this period, was followed in the 12th and 14th centuries by the practice of reading them in the manuscript text. Assonance, intended for the ear alone, was replaced by rhyme proper. The old poems were rejuvenated and lengthened : the epic evolves in the direction of the romance (1).

(1) It should here be observed that as early as the middle of the 15th century rhymes were done away with in the "chansons de geste", or in other words prose took the place of rhymed verse. It was these prose versions that the early printers popularised. Thus it came about that the "chansons de geste" paved the way for the popular ~~romances~~ of the *Bibliothèque Bleue* (17th et 18th centuries).

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The old French epics may be divided into two groups : the royal cycle and the feudal cycle.

The royal cycle centres round Charlemagne. The great emperor, whose mighty deeds had strongly impressed the popular imagination, very soon became a poetic and legendary figure. The most remarkable poem of this group, and the masterpiece of French epic poetry in the Middle Ages, is the *Chanson de Roland*. In the form in which it has reached us, it dates from the second



TROUBADOUR OF THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY RECITING

After a manuscript in the Arsenal Library, Paris.

The three persons on the left represent the troubadour's audience.

half of the 11th century. But it shows signs of having been composed at an earlier period, and it has undoubtedly been remodelled. The poem is characterised by a powerful imaginative quality and a still very imperfect art. The poetry lies in the situations and the sentiment, very little if at all in the structure. The legend has transformed the historical facts. Of a mere rear-guard action, in which a few knights of Charlemagne's army, on their way back from an expedition against the Saracens in the north of Spain, had been waylaid and cut up in the vale of Roncesvalles by the Basque hillmen, it made a fearful battle, in which the flower of the Christian barons, to the number of twenty thousand, were assailed and overwhelmed by one hundred thou-

The Heroic Inspiration in the Literature of the Middle Ages.

sand Sarracens. Every detail is magnified proportionately : the quality of the heroes (Roland, Olivier, Charlemagne, Turpin), the majesty of the setting, the importance of the episodes, the causes and the effects.

The *Chanson de Roland* is, by its inspiration, a truly national epic. At that distant period when the French fatherland was but just beginning to be constituted, the poem gives expression to the love for "la douce France". It also expresses the two great sentiments of the Middle Ages: the lofty enthusiasm of the knight in the service of his sovereign and his zeal in waging war against the infidel.

Nor is the form less national than the subject matter.

The nature of the French genius is already made manifest in the poem by the lucidity of its plan and by its dramatic construction. The action is developed, without the intrusion of any foreign element, from Charlemagne's preparations and Ganelon's treason down to Roland's



THE DEATH OF ROLAND

This miniature is taken from a manuscript of the "*Grandes Chroniques de France*".

The manuscript dates from the XIVth century and belongs to the National Library (Bibliothèque Nationale). It is inspired by the central scene of the "*Chanson de Roland*".

death and the punishment inflicted upon the Sarracens and upon the traitor. As in a drama, we have an exposition and a denouement. There is even the great central incident that forms the knot of the action: the episode in which Roland scorns to call the emperor to his assistance and engages in an unequal fight.

Both in France and in foreign lands the success of the *Chanson de Roland* was immense. It was translated into German before the middle of the 12th century, into Dutch and old Norwegian at the beginning of the 13th. It enjoyed tremendous popu-

History of French Literature.

larity in England and even in Spain. In Italy, it started an important movement that culminated in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*.

The feudal epic reflects the aspirations of the barons, whose aim was to free themselves more and more from the supremacy of kings. Royalty, so respected in the *Chanson de Roland*, is here made a subject of mockery. The clergy fares but little better. It is to the feudal lord, the baron, that accrues all that is taken from the rival powers : he alone is strong, and brave, and great. A first batch of these "songs" deals with the long struggle waged by the barons against the power of the kings in the Carlovingian age : *Ogier le Danois*, *Renaud de Montauban*, *Gérard de Roussillon*. Another group relates the struggles of the vassals among themselves, hereditary struggles kept up from generation to generation : *Raoul de Cambrai*, the *Geste des Lorrains*.

2. The Breton Romances.

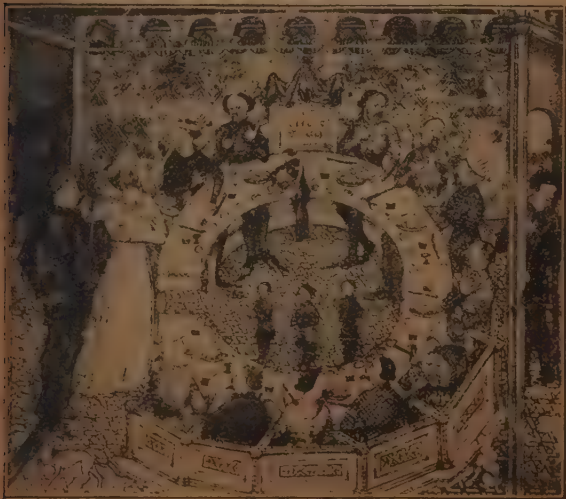
The Breton Romances appear somewhat later : the earliest French versions of these date from the close of the 12th century. They differ considerably from the "chansons de geste". In them, fancy is given free scope; the marvellous plays an important part. Manners are no longer rough and violent, but dainty. Love holds a great place and is expressed in terms both respectful and lofty. We find throughout these compositions the impress of a twofold mysticism, chivalric and religious.

These traits belong preeminently to the Celtic spirit, which had never been lost. In the British Isles a whole range of popular poetry had derived its inspiration therefrom. Setting to work upon reminiscences of the struggle waged by the Britons against the Saxons in the 5th and 6th centuries, as the result of which they had been driven westwards to Wales, to Cornwall, and to Brittany, it incorporates them in the "Legend of Arthur", in which are interwoven with the popular superstitions the memories of the wars of independence, the traditions of the establishment of Christianity in Gaul, and the influence of the legend of Charlemagne. A king of that name had actually lived in the 6th century. Victorious at first, he had been slain in a decisive battle for British independence. The legend makes of him an invincible conqueror. He drives the Saxons out of England and leads his armies as far as Rome. Called back by the revolt of his nephew Modred, he is wounded. The fairies bear him away to the isle of Avalon, whence he is to return some day to set the Britons free.

In his city of Caerleon, Arthur has instituted the Order of the Round Table, at which there is neither first nor last, but the

The Heroic Inspiration in the Literature of the Middle Ages.

knights are one and all on a footing of perfect equality, are served at the same time and in a like manner. From Arthur's court there set out a number of knights, Percival, Lancelot of the Lake, Gawain : they go in quest of the Holy Grail, a mysterious vessel in which was collected the blood of Our Lord. They travel



THE ROUND TABLE

After a miniature of « Lancelot du Lac », dating from the XIVth century. (Bibl. Nat.)

The knights are represented taking their meal at the table from which they derive their name. The young knight on the left, led by an old man, is Galahad, for whom is reserved the empty seat, the "seat perilous".

through a countryside fertile in prodigies, through forests in which the fairy Vivian holds prisoner the enchanter Merlin. The Grail, concealed in a Northumbrian forest to preserve it from being profaned by the Saxons, can only be found by an absolutely stainless knight. Its discovery is to herald the liberation of Great Britain.

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The Breton legend was taken up by literary writers, notably by Geoffrey of Monmouth, in his *Historia Britannica*, more mythical than real, translated into French by Wace. But although these learned works had a certain influence upon the composition of the Breton romances, the latter are the direct outcome of the popular poetry. Singers journeyed through Brittany, singing the old time stories to the accompaniment of a small harp called the *hrote*. Their songs were embodied in short narrative compositions, usually in octosyllabic lines, called *lais* (lays). From the Celtic they were very soon translated into French. Others followed, such as those of Marie de France, composed about 1170. At the same time two Anglo-Norman poets, Bérout and Thomas, relate the love of Tristan and Yseult, a subject repeated at the beginning of the next century in a romance in prose. These lays constitute the real transition from Celtic poetry to its French imitation.

The earliest Breton romances were no longer intended to be sung, but to be read. For this reason they were at first written out in prose. Subsequently the subject matter was set in rhymed verse by a fluent and prolific poet, **Chrestien de Troyes** in *Perceval le Gallois*, *les Chevaliers au Lion*, *Lancelot en la Charette*, *Cligès*, *Erec et Enide* (1160-1180). The hero of these romances, Lancelot, embodies the type of knightly ("courtois") love, such as every knight owed to his lady fair.

The Breton romances spread over Europe. They were imitated in Italy, in the 15th and 16th centuries; in Spain, where they constitute Don Quixote's library, and whence they return to France in a compilation by Herberay des Essarts, bearing the title of *Amadis* (1).

Mention should here be made, as an offshoot of narrative poetry, of the Epic of Antiquity, written by clerks in imitation of the "Chansons de geste" and the Breton romances: the *Roman d'Alexandre*, written in the 12th century by **Lambert le Tors** and **Alexandre de Bernay**; the *Roman de Troie*, written about 1160 by *Benoît de Sainte-More*, after apocryphal compilations of the 3rd century; the *Roman d'Eneas*, by the same author, to whom is also attributed the *Roman de Thèbes*. The works of this cycle have but scant literary value; there is to be found in them no trace of historical truth or local colour. Troy is a mediaeval town; Calchas, a bishop; the heroes are feudal barons. The best of these productions is the *Roman d'Alexandre*. It is written in lines of twelve syllables, whence is supposed to have been derived — although earlier examples are to be found — the name of Alexandrines given to this kind of verse. Alexander is pre-

(1) The legends of the Breton romances supplied the subject matter of Richard Wagner's lyrical dramas.

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sented as the very model of knightly perfection ; the epic borders upon the didactic poem and ends in a moral disquisition upon the emptiness of human glory. Truth to say, these compositions are epics only in name.

3. History.

There had been no interruption in the writing of history during the Middle Ages, but it was written in Latin, within the walls of the convents.

For the laity the " *Chansons de geste* " filled the place of history. The aristocracy, alone concerned in preserving the memory of events they had guided and fashioned, were content with oral transmission, or conventual records.

In the reign of Saint Louis, the monks of Saint-Denis began to compile the *Grandes Chroniques*, which were brought down to the accession of Louis XI. They are the official history.

What originally led to the writing of history was the deep movement of curiosity produced by the Crusades. Part of the nobility had remained in France : they were eager to know how the expedition fared. The churchmen were kept informed by many letters sent from the Near East, and with the help of these the clerks wrote their chronicles in Latin. The lords again heard from the survivors what had occurred out yonder. It was chiefly by utilising these oral accounts, handed on from one to another, that the trouvères composed narratives set in the mould then in favour : that of the " *Chansons de geste* " (e. g. the *Chanson d'Antioche*). Then it was perceived that the requirements of versification impaired the accuracy of the recital. This led to the writing of history in prose. The earliest of these compositions were the work of the Anglo-Saxons. It was the fourth Crusade that gave France her first historian, Geoffroy de Villehardouin.

Geoffroy de Villehardouin, Marshal of Champagne (1160-1213), himself took a prominent part in the expedition. He became Marshal of Rumania, and it was at Messinople, the fief assigned to him as his share of the conquest, that he wrote his history, about 1207. Villehardouin thus affords us the first example of a noted leader relating what he has actually seen and done. By so doing, he created in France a branch of literature destined to acquire the highest importance, the *Memoirs*.

His work, styled *Histoire de la Conquête de Constantinople*, or *Chronique des Empereurs Baudouin et Henri de Constantinople*, covers the period between 1198 and 1207. It is not unlike a " *Chanson de geste* ", in that the noble lord, writing history in prose for the first time and as it were by accident, is still under the influence of that style of composition, the movement and

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form of which he reproduces. But he infuses into his narrative the qualities of a man of action : rapidity and directness. His style is of marked sobriety and vigour. The descriptive passages, frequently conveying the astonishment awakened in him by new wonders, are sketched in with a few bold strokes.

Again we are told of the Crusades by the **Sire de Joinville** (1224-1317), in his *Histoire de Saint Louis*. Joinville finished



JOINVILLE OFFERING HIS WORKS TO LOUIS LE HUTIN

After a miniature from the "*Histoire de St Louis*", XIVth century (Bibl. Nat.).

his book in 1309. But he was then eighty-five years of age, and he belongs in reality to the 13th century. A native of Champagne like Villehardouin, he was brought up at the Court of Thibaut IV, King of Navarre and a poet, whose gentleman-server he was. He was Seneschal of Champagne when he set out on the seventh Crusade. At Cyprus he first met the French king whose adviser and friend he became. He attended him throughout the Crusade (1248-1254), but he refused to embark on the next one. King Philippe III entrusted him, about the year 1283, with the administration of the County of Champagne during the minority of Jeanne de Navarre. It was at the special request

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of that princess, after she had become the spouse of Philippe le Bel, that he wrote the history of the saintly king, with the help of his own recollections, of his notes, and also some previous writings.

In this book, charmingly simple and lively, Joinville's aim is one of edification, while he is inspired by the example of the hagiographers. In intellect, he is far from equalling Villehardouin. He is no statesman, no leader of men, and he has few ideas. But he can tell a story in a very pleasant manner, and he excels in the delineation of character. With the lapse of a century, the language has become more supple, and the mind of the narrator has undergone the same process. Joinville does not fear to launch forth into digressions : in the middle of a war story, he stops short to tell us of the various peoples of Egypt and the East, of the mysterious sources of the Nile, located in the " Earthly Paradise ", of the mighty floods of that river, which in his opinion the will of God alone can explain. Honest and straightforward in character, and with a tendency to moralise, Joinville writes from the fulness of his heart.

4. Lyrical Poetry.

In Northern France there sprang up and developed an original lyrical poetry, the earliest forms of which, truly spontaneous and popular, were the dancing song, the weaving song and the ballad. The latter, very closely allied to the epic, was properly speaking a tale meant to be sung. The ballad contains a short epic tale. Such are the songs of *Raynaud*, *Belle Erembor*, *Belle Doette*. The *pastourelle* is a song relating to shepherdesses. The theme is usually as follows : a knight meets a shepherdess and offers her his love, which she sometimes accepts, and sometimes refuses.

In the South of France, again, there had come into being, as early as the close of the 11th century, a literary and refined form of lyrical poetry. It was written in a dialect of the langue d'oc, the Limousin idiom that was adopted by all the poets of the South. The chief seat of learning was the Court of the Counts of Toulouse, and the prevailing theme of these lyrical poems was knightly love (*l'amour courtois*), an idealised and romantic love, which is a transposition into the realm of human sentiments of Christian love, an exstastic aspiration towards the Infinite and Perfect Deity.

As early as the second half of the 12th century, Provençal poetry exerted a very deep influence upon the poetry of the North. After the marriage of Count Henri IV with a Southern Princess, the Court of Champagne became a centre of " courtois " manners and literature. At the close of the 12th and 13th centuries, one part of the Northern poetry sought its inspiration from the " cour-

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tois " love, while another part remained faithful to its native traditions. It is therefore necessary to distinguish between two

groups.

For **Conon de Béthune, Renaud de Coucy, Blondel de Nesles, Thibaut IV**, Count of Champagne, lyrical poetry is in the nature of a pastime. A knight must know how to break a lance, to play chess and to compose a ditty. But all these love songs are just so many mental diversions. Their chief merit lies in perfection of form. The oldest are set in *assonant stanzas*. In the 13th century, rhyme is substituted for *assonance*. The authors, who are both musicians and poets, are deeply versed in the science of rhythm, and take an artistic delight in accumulating fresh difficulties for the pleasure of surmounting them.

The other group, in opposition to this literary, refined and artificial lyricism, derives its inspiration from altogether different sources. We will deal with it in the next chapter.

II

BOURGEOIS AND SATIRICAL LITERATURE

1. The Gaulois Spirit and the *Tabliaux*.

With the feudal and chivalric inspiration, the religious, patriotic, or sentimental ideal that finds its expression in the "*Chansons de geste*" and in the romances of the Round Table, is contrasted what is conventionally denominated the *Gaulois* spirit. To this day the term is applied to the spirit of satire, raillery, and disparagement, to the popular and cynical merriment that inspires a whole section of French Literature. It is unfair to the Gauls to associate their name with the least pure and lofty elements of French Literature, when on the contrary knightly love is of *Celtic* origin and the poetry of the troubadours — Gallo-Roman throughout — errs rather on the side of excessive refinement.

In common fairness, we should speak not of the *Gaulois* but of the *bourgeois* spirit. Satirical and irreverential effusions are the weapons of the weak against the strong. In a social hierarchy powerfully organised and maintained, such as that of the Middle Ages, the assaults upon the nobility and the Church naturally assumed a sharper and more bitter character. Again, the French genius with its taste for virtuosity, its sense of art, its detachment from the concrete, goes as far in the realism of the "*bourgeois*" literature as in the idealism of the chivalric literature. In its boundless wealth and variety, it reaches both extremes and fills up all the intervening space.

The "*jongleurs*" were not content with singing the epic com-

positions; they also recited short tales after meals. These tales, originally mere improvisations, were subsequently set down in verse. They are the *Fableaux* or *Fabliaux* (1).

Thesesprightly tales—by unknown authors—seldom have a moral bearing. The pleasure to be derived from them lies in their racy banter, acute observation and keen sense of the ridiculous. Its simple composition, a clear straightforward style, the use of the swift octosyllabic metre, all concur in imparting to the “fabliau” a free and lively turn. It is these lighter productions that are most characteristic of the “Gaulois” spirit in the Middle Ages. They afford us at the same time a mirror,—albeit a satirical mirror,—of society, a mischievous presentment of the morals of the age.

The principal types of the aristocratic, clerical, bourgeois and popular classes of society appear before us with their garb, their manner of speech and their deportment: the rugged or courtly knight, the country priest, the monk, the magistrate, the merchant, the small landowner, the varlet, the very beggar. One and all play their part in a manner true to life. The women, whether of noble or bourgeois quality, are plentifully though somewhat slightly represented; frailty and malice are attributed to them in equal proportions. This deliberate bias is one of the most objectionable elements of the “Gaulois” spirit.

By their clever construction and life-like realism the fabliaux are akin to the *farces* of the comic drama. They overstepped the boundaries of France and were acclimatised in England with Chaucer, in Italy with Boccacio.

Later on, when French *conteurs* and poets, such as La Fontaine, for instance, borrowed their subjects from the *Decameron*, they simply took back what was originally their own.

2. Satirical Productions. The *Roman de Renart*.

The Middle Ages were rich in fables of various origins, all of which were then ascribed to Aesop. Queen **Marie de France** was the author of the earliest collection of fables in verse, the *Ysopet*.

Thence was derived the first conception of the *Roman de Renart*. The first compilation would appear to have been a French original of the 11th century, now lost, and from this the Latin, Flemish and German versions were composed. The text that has come down to us is a rearrangement in thirty thousand lines, dating from no earlier than the end of the 12th century. If to this we add the sequels written in the 13th and 14th centuries, we have a cycle of more than one hundred thousand lines.

(1) The province of Picardy having contributed most to the rich development of this genre, the Picard form of the word — fabliau — eventually prevailed.

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The subject of the *Roman de Renart* is the war between Renart (the Fox) and Ysengrin (the Wolf), a contest dating back to the time of Adam and Eve and carried on amid a thousand laughable incidents, wherein Renart's shrewdness invariably prevails over the witless force of Ysengrin. Many characters are grouped about Renart and Ysengrin : Noble, the Lion, a majestic and



« SOME FIGURES FROM THE ROMAN DE RENART »

After a miniature of the XIVth century.

credulous sovereign ; Brown, the Bear, greedy and loutish ; Rakenau, the She-monkey, a great adept in special pleading ; the Stag Brichemer, who plays the part of supreme judge ; Bernard, the Donkey and sacred orator ; the Cock Chanticleer, trumpeter to the royal army, etc. But the master of them all is Renart himself, by turns physician, juggler and monk, equally good tempered under each and every garb and bearing no grudge against those he so egregiously fools.

In all these characters, certain traits borrowed from the human race are mingled with the sentiments and deportment of the particular animal they represent ; it will thus be seen that the *Roman de Renart* is but an offshoot of the Aesopian fable. The authors have no other aim than to be entertaining. But the public they address is essentially that of the lower middle classes, particularly the bourgeois in the towns ; accordingly the ideas and institutions of the aristocratic and ecclesiastical society are constantly held up to ridicule. The chivalric and feudal spirit had inspired a **genre** of its own : the epic. The *Roman de Renart*

is a parody of the "Chansons de geste", inspired by the bourgeois spirit and devoid of social bearing. With the wordy imitators who wrote the 13th and 14th century sequels, the satire is yet sharper. Renart becomes the universal *scoffer*, the derider of every social power, of every authority, whether profane or sacred, a revolutionary character, a forerunner of Figaro.

3. The bourgeois Lyricism : Rutebeuf.

At the very time when the "courtois" poetry enjoyed the highest vogue, more popular compositions were seen to persist or to spring up, giving reality and nature a footing in lyrical verse. Thus we find the popular pastourelle contrasting with the knightly songs. The pastourelles of Picardy frequently exhibit a whole aspect of rural life, as seen by such minds as have felt the charm of commonplace reality and have attempted to give it expression.

Many topical pieces, born of circumstance — laments, disputes, leave-takings — reflect general sentiments or express personal emotions. Some are anonymous, such as the *Complainte de Jerusalem*. Others have come down to us with the names of their authors, as for instance the *Congé* of **Jean Bodel** d'Arras, taking leave of his native city before shutting himself up in a Lepers' hospital, and that of **Adam de la Halle**, driven forth by local squabbles. As often as not, the trouvère depicts himself for the benefit of his contemporaries with all his troubles, as one who has come down in the world, and with his pressing needs, thus introducing into his verse a personal note and light banter, and giving it the nature both of lyricism and satire. This is the case with the Champagne "jongleur", **Colin Muset**, and pre-eminently with **Rutebeuf**.

The latter deserves a place apart. He is the prototype of the *genre* and Villon's ancestor. Little is known of his actual life. He was a Parisian and died about 1280. With him satire sometimes reaches the height of lyricism, and it is this lyrical quality that we find also in his personal compositions. A hundred years before Villon he sang with genuine poignancy his moral and physical abjection, his passion for gambling, his miserable condition as a writer in the pay of the great, his remorse and his penitence.

4. The *Roman de la Rose*.

Allegory, which represents the figures of living persons, in the form of abstractions i. e. of ideas and sentiments, and causes them to act and to speak, was a very popular means of expression in the Middle Ages. It possesses a certain refinement which stimulated the curiosity

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while flattering the self vanity of the reader, especially of women.

Of all the allegorical writings of the Middle Ages, the most famous is the *Roman de la Rose*. It consists of two parts, differing greatly the one from the other, both by the spirit that infuses them and by their style.

The first part, written in the first third of the 13th century by **Guillaume de Lorris**, is merely an "Art of Love", in the regular

"courtois" tradition. The rose is the symbol of the beloved woman. The poem is the recital of a dream, in which the poet, one fine May morning, attempts to approach, amid the marvels of an orchard, the fresh and beautiful rose guarded by a whole company of personified abstractions: Evil Mouth (Slander), Reason, Jealousy, etc.

In Guillaume de Lorris's delicate analysis, we feel genuine respect for woman and love. This first part shows a real knowledge of the human heart; as a poem, it is one of the masterpieces of



THE SLEEPING POET

This miniature is taken from a manuscript of the "*Roman de la Rose*", dating from the XIVth century (Bibl. Nat.).

The poet is represented asleep, plunged in the dream of which his work gives the account. In the distance is the garden where the action takes place.

the Middle Ages. The language is supple, clear, graceful, frequently powerful and eloquent.

Guillaume de Lorris left his poem unfinished. Towards 1277 **Jean de Meung** undertook to continue it. Taking up the poem at the point at which it broke off, he preserved the characters and the general setting; but as a matter of fact everything is changed. The idealistic spirit gives way to the bourgeois spirit, delicate psychology to social and philosophic theories and to erudition. The work of Jean de Meung is a learned cyclopædia

and a satire. The lover, whose passion was the subject to be studied, has nothing to do but to listen to endless speeches. Dame Reason, in an incoherent harangue, talks to him of love, justice, fortune, good and evil, and many other things besides. The friend describes the golden age and the origin of societies. Finally Dame Nature, in a general confession to Genius, her chaplain, discourses at great length upon philosophy and physics. Only after some twenty-two thousand lines does the lover actually pluck the Rose.

What invests this second part even to-day with a living interest is the boldness of a satire that spares nobody and presumes to call in question the very foundations of political and social institutions. Jean de Meung foreshadows Rabelais, Voltaire and Beaumarchais. He is the first instance of those writers who instead of being content with producing a work of art, aim at stimulating and guiding public opinion. In his way, moreover, and in spite of his wordiness, he is a great writer, possessed of clear and compelling eloquence, of a frequently piquant realism with truly poetic flashes and a keen sense of nature.

By reason of the very difference between them, the two parts of the *Roman de la Rose*, contributed equally to the success of the work: the one with the young men and the women, the other with the clerks and bourgeois. This poem, in which a twofold spirit is made manifest, is in this respect one of those which best sum up the various aspirations of the Middle Ages. Nor did it fail to exert considerable influence, witness as the attacks it called forth. Christine de Pisan, on account of its jeers at woman, considers it only fit to be burned; Gerson, Chancellor of the University of Paris, condemns its boldness, but the better to combat it borrows its artistic setting, and writes a *Vision de Gerson* (1402). From the end of the 14th century to the middle of the 16th, the *Roman de la Rose* was the most famous work in French Literature. There are very many manuscripts still extant and as soon as the art of printing was invented, edition followed upon edition. Marot produced a new and rejuvenated version in 1527. There were published a Flemish translation, an Italian translation — in sonnets throughout — and an English translation, long attributed to Chaucer.

5. Didactic and moral Poetry.

Though not very learned themselves, the Middle Ages set great store by learning. At no time were didactic treatises of every description so numerous. The clerks wrote upon every conceivable scientific and moral question. Some of these treatises are of a cyclopædic character, as for instance the *Image du Monde* (13th century), by Gautier de Metz, containing seven thousand lines; the celebrated *Trésor de Sapience* (1263), in prose, by Brunetto Latino,

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a Florentine, said to have been Dante Alighieri's master. Other works are confined to some special branch of science : the *Bes-tiaires*, describing the animal kingdom ; the *Lapidaires*, wherein are enumerated, from Oriental sources, the characteristics and properties of precious or exotic stones.

The mediaeval conception of science is, however, strange enough ; it considers the material world as a mere symbol of the world of ideas ; so much so indeed that every scientific description must needs be completed by an allegory and wind up with a moral interpretation. What is sought for in animals, for instance, is some analogy with God, Christ, the Virtues, the Vices.

Of the works of a specially moral character, several are mere translations from the easiest works of the Latin decadence such as Cato's *Distiches*, the work of a 6th century grammarian ; the *Consolation* of Boethius, etc. Others, of greater interest as far as we are concerned, are works of educational tendencies, in which the author strives to teach perfection and to set up the ideal of politeness : the *Doctrinal de Courtoisie*, the *Castoiment d'un Père à son Fils* (12th century), the *Castoiment des Dames*. The moral poetry frequently verges upon satire, as in the *Etats du Monde*. Lastly the *Dits* are little compositions in verse, more satirical than didactic, and concerned with the manners of the age, notably with the various social conditions and the professions : the *Dit des Jacobins*, the *Dit des Rues de Paris*, the *Dit des Cornettes*, and last but not least, Rutebeuf's *Dit de l'Erberie*, which may be looked upon as the final stage of the evolution of the genre in the direction of the dramatic monologue.

III

THE DECAY OF MEDIAEVAL LITERATURE

1. The literary Mediocrity of the 14th century : Minor Poems in a set form.

During the first third of the 14th century, the decay of the genres that prevailed in the Middle Ages becomes more and more pronounced, until it reaches its final stage in the following century, while the public mind laboriously evolves in the direction of modern ideas. Hence the contrasts in the literature of the 15th century, alternately courtly and chivalric, bourgeois and realistic, bombastic and pedantic.

The poetic vein is worked bare as early as the 14th century, But the production increases rather than diminishes. During the periods of decay, the number of new works becomes larger in

proportion as the inspiration weakens. And furthermore the first concern of the poets is to make up for their lack of imagination by the science of rhythm, which they complicate wantonly. Presently we witness the appearance of countless minor poems in a set form: the song royal, the ballad, the single and the double roundelay. In rhyming these, the versifiers indulge in a number of difficult and childish feats of skill. Their whole art resides in artificial combinations and laboured mechanism.

Guillaume de Machaut (1300-1377) and **Jean Froissart** (1337-1410) are belated but not ungraceful contributors to "courtly" and chivalric poetry. **Eustache Deschamps** (1345-1405), a highly prolific writer, combines the same tradition with a satirical and moral spirit. A prominent Court official, he travelled much, extending his peregrinations to Bohemia and Hungary. He was personally acquainted with all the leading characters of one of the most troubled periods of French history and played a part in the public affairs of his age. For this reason his historical poems afford exceptional interest. The most notable of these is the ballad *Sur le trépas de Bertrand Du Guesclin*. We may still turn to his verse to-day for the history of the king and of his kingdom during forty years.

2. Prose Writings : Froissart's *Chroniques*.

From poetry **Froissart** passed on to history. The success of his verse had brought him powerful patrons. As a gentleman-in-waiting to Queen Philippa of Hainaut, wife of Edward III, he visited Scotland, Western France and Italy. He left the English Court for the Court of the Duke of Brabant, whence he repaired successively to the Courts of the Comte de Blois and the Comte de Foix. He met Chaucer in England, Petrarch in Italy. Attracted by the pageantry and brilliant aspects of high society, he devoted the greater part of his life to collecting and classifying the material for his work, and writing up those *Chroniques de France, Angleterre, Ecosse, Espagne, Bretagne, Gascogne, Flandres et autres lieux*, in which he undertook to relate "the great marvels and doughty deeds witnessed in the great wars between France and England". The Hundred Years War is the centre round which the narrative revolves.

Froissart writes for the great in the land; he finds room in his work only for what is of a nature to interest them, that is to say tales of war and knightly prowess. He is the brilliant painter of a society very soon about to be transformed and to disappear. He is a great artist, one who has the gift of observation and can impart the result to others. The physiognomy of the characters, their demeanour and their speech, their dress, their castles, their battles, festivities and tournaments, all live again before

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our eyes with the vivid colouring and minute detail of an old illumination. But he does not look beneath the surface ; there must be expected of him neither the psychology that explains the souls of men, nor the philosophy that explains events, looking back to their causes in the past and forward to their future conse-



THE BATTLE OF CRECY, BETWEEN THE KINGS OF FRANCE AND ENGLAND (1340)

Miniature taken from a manuscript of Froissart's "Chronicles", XVth century (Bibl. Nat.).

quences. Neither is he possessed of the critical faculty. He seeks his information from the witnesses that are likely to be best informed and writes down their testimony without verifying it; he is both inquisitive and credulous, with a natural fondness for what is extraordinary, marvellous and mythical.

3. The 15th Century.

In the 15th century, we need not dwell upon the writings of **Christine de Pisan** (1363-1431) and of **Al in Chartier** (1390-1449), both of whom write verse and prose with equal fluency. That the latter enjoyed a widespread reputation is shown, however, by a graceful legend. In this it is claimed that Margaret of Scotland, happening upon the poet when he was wrapped in sleep, imprinted a kiss on his lips as a tribute of honour to "that precious mouth from which have dropped such a number of witty remarks and virtuous phrases". The poetry of the age may be summed up in the work of two poets, representative of the two main tendencies of mediaeval literature.



THE LADIES' CITY

after a manuscript copy of the poem of Christine de Pisan, XVth century (Munich Library).

In the background is seen the city constructed by the poetess in honour of her sex. In the foreground Christine, followed by the famous women who aspire to be admitted into the city is received by the patronesses of the undertaking, among whom the Virgin Mary may be remarked.

Charles d'Orléans (1391-1465) was the nephew of King Charles VI. Taken prisoner at Agincourt, he underwent twenty-five years' captivity in England, during which time he composed in prison the greater part of his poems: ballads, songs and roundelays. In these, however, he makes but little mention of his real misfortunes. For him, poetry is a highly refined pastime. Yet we discern in all his utterances a melancholy which is not the least charm of his delicate art.

Between Charles d'Orléans and **Villon** the contrast is absolute. Villon is a son of the people and from the people his poetry is derived. Born in Paris in 1431, and adopted by a canon who provided for his education, he led as a youth the life of a student in the Middle Ages, riotous, undisciplined and dissolute. At the

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age of twenty, when he had just obtained his degree as a Master of Arts, he disappeared for a twelvemonth after mortally wound-



CHARLES D'ORLÉANS A CAPTIVE IN THE TOWER OF LONDON

This miniature is taken from a manuscript copy of the poems of Charles d'Orléans, dating from the XVth century and belonging to the British Museum. On the right, the poet is seen occupied in transcribing his verses. In the distance is a view of London.

ing an adversary in a quarrel, and came back only to plunge into the most lawless existence. By reason of his association with a gang of thieves, he was on the verge of being arrested in 1457, when he again disappeared from the scene. After serving two terms of imprisonment he was condemned to be hanged in 1462, but was let off with ten years' banishment from 1463. Here we lose sight of him altogether : it is not even known in what year he died. The earliest edition of his works (*Ballades*, the *Petit Testament* and the *Grand Testament*) was published in 1489.

If Villon's poetry moves us by a pathetic accent of sincerity, it is because he feels so poignantly the discrepancy that lies between his aspirations and the manner of his life. He is haunted by visions of his unworthy past, he feels the qualms of remorse and repentance, he mourns over his wasted youth, the idea of death is a torture to him. Thus it comes about that, degraded as he is, he soars at times, quite naturally, to the heights of Christian poetry. He is at the same time a remarkably vivid and picturesque word-painter. In a few powerful strokes he calls up the scene he wishes to bring home to us, from the old crones squatting round their small fire of hemp fibres to the grinning skeletons swayed to and fro by the wind under the Montfaucon gibbets.

From the time when his works were first published to the present day, Villon has never lapsed into oblivion. Highly in favour during the 16th century, chiefly through the medium of Marot's edition (1533), with its amendments and comments, he is still read and appreciated in the 17th, as we gather from Boileau's *Art poétique*. Even in the 18th century he is not neglected. No other poet, in fine, derives greater advantage from the Romantic reaction : his bohemian life, the variety of his style combining the grotesque with the sublime, his somewhat crude realism, were all of a nature to cause him to be looked upon as a forerunner.

By the side of this true poet, or more properly speaking at the opposite end of the social scale, the French 15th century presents us a great prose-writer, the historian **Commynes**. The son of a High Bailiff of France, the Chamberlain and Privy Counsellor of the Duke of Burgundy and of three French Kings, Monseigneur Philippe de Commines (1447-1511), Prince de Talmont, Baron d'Argenson, was a shrewd statesman, a wary counsellor and an expert diplomatist.

In his *Mémoires*, ranging from 1454 to 1496, he relates the events he witnessed : the close of the feudal struggles and the beginning of modern wars, the extinction of knightly power and the might of diplomacy. Unlike Froissart, he sets no store by mighty sword-thrusts. He is concerned not with the picturesque detail of events, but with their sequence and concatenation. He writes philosophical and political history. Commynes is inclined

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to look upon self-interest as the one and only motive that guides human conduct, just as the standard measure of our actions is success. But he by no means advocates immorality, like Macchiavelli, nor does he aver, after the German fashion, that success is a sufficient justification in itself. He is all for skilful negotiation and the respect of treaties. A diplomatist himself, he puts his trust in the instruments of diplomacy. Finally he is deeply religious. His vast experience has led him to recognise that in history everything cannot be accounted for by natural and human causes. As Bossuet did later on, he discerns and as it were catches the hand of God in every act.

Commynes is thus a great thinker who, to be the equal of a Thucydides, lacked merely the artistic sense. This sense the Renaissance was soon to bring with it, by restoring to French writers the comprehension of Latin and Greek antiquity.

IV

THE DRAMA

1. Religious origin of the Drama in the Middle Ages.

The drama was born in the Church and of the Church. It was never, as sometimes stated erroneously, part and parcel of divine worship, but what is true is that at first, and in the nave itself, it had the religious ceremonial as its setting, Latin, the sacred tongue, as its organ, the clerks as authors and actors, the congregation as public.

Such was the *liturgical drama* of the 11th century, introduced into the service as a development or continuation. The texts of the liturgy supplied subjects that were readily dramatised. At Christmas, for instance, there was the drama of the Shepherds, an actual staging of the Gospel, with the manger, the Virgin and Child, the star, suspended by a thread, to which one of the Magi directed the eyes of all present, the choir boys high up under the roof of the church, representing the angels and singing *Gloria in Excelsis*, and lastly the Adoration of the Shepherds.

By degrees, the liturgical drama underwent an alteration. The vulgar tongue and versification found their way into the consecrated text. The stage was no longer set within the church. The change had already become an accomplished fact in the course of the 12th century, as witness the *Jeu d'Adam*. This little drama of 1301 lines, in the Normandy dialect (except the stage directions and interpolated canonic texts, which are in Latin), is the real forerunner of the French drama. It is remarkable by its

comprehension of scenic effect and by an instinctive psychology that already attempts the delineation of character, by the natural grace of the language, by the sobriety and ease of the developments. In one and all of these points it seems to foreshadow the brilliant future of dramatic literature in France.

Of the plays written in the 13th century, there have come down to us the *Jeu de Saint-Nicolas*, by Jean Bodel d'Arras, and the *Miracle de Theophile*, by Rutebeuf. To the 14th century belong the *Miracles de Notre-Dame*, which may be defined as the staging of a



ONE OF OUR LADY'S MIRACLES

After a XVth century manuscript (Bibl. Nat.).

The story illustrated by this miniature is entitled : " Miracle of a thief hung on the gallows, but preserved from death at the last moment by the Virgin Mary ".

miraculous event brought about by the intervention of the Virgin. The dramatic interest attaching to these miracle plays is quite out of the common. The profane elements are piled up lavishly, pending final purification by the apparition of Our Lady. Dramatic interest equal to this is only to be found in certain plays of the Spanish dramatists, such as Calderon's *Devotion to the Cross*.

2. The Mysteries.

These plays, styled "mystères", or "mistères", are the form in which this Drama of the Middle Ages finds its most perfect

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expression. They are drawn from the Old Testament and from the New, from the Lives of the Saints, exceptionally from History proper. The mystery play consists of scenes laid amid all manner of contrasts and incongruities, regardless of time and place. It is of interminable length — 30.000, 40.000, 60.000 lines, written with deplorable facility. The authors are not artists in the full sense of the word, but they possessed the art of varying the scenes



SCENE FROM A MYSTERY PASSION PLAY,
given at Valenciennes in 1547 (Bibl. Nat.).

The artist has signed his work with these words : " The painter, who was also an actor in the Mystery.

to suit the taste of their age and of constantly stimulating the attention of the crowds by avoiding monotony. The subjects moreover conform with the religious beliefs : no plays performed on any stage ever met with a like success. The most famous of these mysteries was **Arnould Gréban's** *Passion*, performed in 1452. It is divided into four days and comprises 34,574 lines and close upon 400 characters. There are to be found in it, together with inventions worthy of any great dramatist, certain passages of a most felicitous turn.

Three outstanding features characterise the " mysteries " : a constant use of the supernatural (intervention of God, of the Virgin and of the Saints, subsequently of abstract cha-

racters — Justice, Peace, Truth, Mercy), the intermingling of tragedy and comedy, the anachronism of the stage properties, the costumes and the manners. The characters of the Old and of the New Testament are represented as people of the 15th century (except Christ and the Virgin, who wore the traditional long white tunic and blue cloak). The comic element is borrowed from scenes of contemporary public life.



SCENES FROM THE PROLOGUE OF THE SAME MYSTERY PLAY

In this miniature the painter "who was also an actor," has reproduced several scenes from the Prologue, relative to the birth of Jesus Christ. The scenes followed each other in one unique setting, of which we here see the right handside : *Paradise, Nazareth, the Temple* etc.

The "mysteries" are written in octosyllabic lines, rhyming two and two and with lyrical passages that must have been intended to be chanted.

For a long time the Middle Ages possessed neither permanent theatres, nor professional actors. The performances were by no means regular, but took place on the liturgical date of the mystery, or on special occasions: when it was desired, for instance, to call down the protection of Heaven in the case of some visitation, or to return thanks for some mercy obtained. Some months before the appointed date a "cry" or solemn proclamation was sent out, for the purpose of announcing the forth-

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coming play, of appealing for gifts of money or of costumes, of soliciting the help of voluntary actors. All vied with each other in heightening the splendour of the show : the clergy, the town councils and the brotherhoods each bore a portion of the costs. At times a prince or a private individual took the expense entirely upon himself.

The theatre, built of planks for the duration of the performances, was set up in the public square. It comprised a level space, very much like our present stage, but of large dimensions, round which were set out at intervals, some little distance back, the "*mansions*", or small independent structures representing the various places of the action, the idea being to provide simultaneous scenery. Paradise was located above the *mansions*, generally on a sort of lateral dais, and hell in the basement ; the demons leapt on the stage through the jaws of a dragon that opened and closed like a trap door.

The earliest permanent company, giving regular performances, on a durable stage, was the celebrated association of the Brethren of the Passion. It comprised bourgeois and artisans and was incorporated on September 4th, 1402, by letters patent from Charles VI. The first performances took place in the main hall on the ground floor of the Hôpital de la Trinité, Paris, on Sundays and public holidays, after vespers. The Brethren were playing at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, when an Order in Parliament (November 17th, 1548) forbidding them to perform sacred mysteries, doomed their theatre to ruin.

The mysteries, which borrowed their subject matter from religion (1), and their developments from scenes of daily life, gave France her one and only national and popular Drama, which was admirably adapted to the production of historical plays in the style of Shakespeare's *Henry IV*, *Henry V*, and *Richard III*. These, however, were not the lines along which French dramatic art was destined to flourish ; for which reason, no doubt, France did not then find her Shakespeare.

3. The profane Drama. — The comic Drama.

The comic Drama did not proceed from the comedies written in the Latin tongue by the clerks, as early as the 10th century, in imitation of Terence and Plautus. The early productions of modern Comedy, down to the Renaissance, appear to have

(1) Besides three cycles constituted by the Old Testament, the New Testament and the Lives of the Saints, there were a small number of profane mysteries, such as the *Mystère du Siège d'Orléans* (1439), by an unknown author, the *Mystère de Troi*. (1463), by Jacques Millet, and the *Mystère de Saint-Louis* (1514), by Pierre Gringoree

been absolutely independent of any comic literature composed in Latin.

Neither is it possible, where actual texts are wanting, to establish with any degree of certainty a transmission to the authors of the Middle Ages of the comic literature of the Ancients. It may be admitted, indeed, judging by the resemblance of the costumes and the persistence of certain scenic effects, that the "bateleurs" of the early Middle Ages were the continuators and heirs of the historians of the Roman Decadence. But there is nothing to warrant the assumption that to this filiation of the players corresponds a filiation of the plays. All the texts tend to prove, on the contrary, that the comic element found spontaneous birth within the religious drama, along with the rest of the more or less serious profane elements.

We know of but five comic plays dating back beyond the 15th century: the *Jeu de la Feuillée* (1262) and the *Jeu de Robin et de Marion* (1283?), by **Adam de la Halle**; the *Farce du Garçon et de l'Aveugle*, performed at Tournai, about 1270; and, some hundred years later, two plays by **Eustache Deschamps** the *Dit des quatre offices de l'hôtel du Roi* and a sort of fabliau in the form of a dialogue, *Maître Trubert et Antroignart*, in which a barrister and a pleader vie with each other in dishonesty — a theme treated later on in *Pathelin* (See below).

Adam de la Halle's plays, the two oldest in the history of the French Drama, are like none of the later works. The *Jeu de la Feuillée* resembles the comedies of Aristophanes by the boldness of the satire levelled at individuals, its flights of fancy and the use made of the supernatural. The *Jeu de Robin et de Marion* is a comic opera. If these plays are really the only ones of their kind and the poet's own original work, Adam de la Halle must have been a remarkable creator. If, on the contrary, they are but samples of "genres" prevailing at the time, and of which there remain no other traces, we must needs admit the existence of a highly developed comic drama, the history of which escapes our knowledge.

The number of the other comic productions of the Middle Ages may be estimated at some two hundred and fifty, divided into moralities, gay sermons, dramatic monologues, light satirical plays termed *soties*, and farces.

We had occasion to observe, with reference to the *Roman de la Rose*, how marked was the fondness of the Middle Ages for personified abstractions and allegorical characters. There is more than a hint of this new taste in certain dialogues, most likely intended to be recited by the "jongleurs", such as the *Débat de l'Hiver et de l'Été*, or the *Bataille de Carême et de Charnage*. It asserts itself, furthermore, though still with comparative discretion, in the religious drama, finally displaying itself with full freedom in the moralities, the arch-type of which is the truly

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scenic dialogue called *Pierre de la Broche qui dispute à Fortune par devant Reson* (end of the 13th century), and in the *Dit des quatre Offices*, by Eustache Deschamps (end of the 14th century). The



A BURLBESQUE PROCESSION IN THE MIDDLE AGES

After a coloured drawing taken from a manuscript of the "Roman de Fauvel" dating from the XIVth century (B. N.).

There are six of them moreover, of an entirely profane and pathetic character, which foreshadow the bourgeois drama. Abaretwo dozen remain, in which may be discerned the germ of the future comedy of manners or character. These are essentially satirical and are divided into three groups, according as the satire is rather

(a) moral (*Bien avisé et Mal avisé*), (b) social (*Eglise, Noblesse et Pauvreté*), or (c) religious (*Le Nouveau Monde, l'Homme obstiné*). The gay sermons no doubt proceed in a straight line from the *Fête des Fous*, and certainly belonged to the parody of the ecclesiastical ceremonial and hierarchy. The monologue, or *Dit*, probably has its origin, together with the "Débat" or "Dispute",

moralities, however, are not all of a comic character. The religious and edifying moralities are akin to the mysteries; others agains by reason of the part played by the supernatural, may be classed with the 14th century miracle plays. There are six of them moreover, of an entirely profane and pathetic character, which foreshadow the bourgeois drama. Abaretwo dozen remain, in which may be discerned the germ of the future comedy of manners or character. These are essentially satirical and are divided into three groups, according as the satire is rather

in the repertory of the histrions of the Roman Decadence.

The "sotie", so called because it was performed by the brotherhood of the "Sots", never attained to any very distinctive individuality. At times a mere buffoonery, it merges, in its more extended shape, into the morality (*Jeu du Prince des Sots et Mère Sotte*, by Gringoire), or into the farce. The latter, when all is said and done, and the make-believe of fanciful titles has been swept aside, really dominates the comic drama of the Middle Ages.

The farce may be looked upon perhaps as a dramatised form of the fabliau — of certain fabliaux, at least, predetermined so to speak to be dramatic, and which, in consequence of this adaptation to the stage, enjoyed a new lease of life in their theatrical shape, while disappearing from the printed collections. Out of the 150 farces that have been preserved, no more than half a dozen are based upon themes common to them with those of the 147 fabliaux extant. The masterpiece of the farce — and likewise of medieval comedy — is *Maistre Pierre Pathelin*, by an unknown author. In this are to be found united, to a supreme degree, the qualities distinguishing the best farces: an exact description of contemporary manners, a life-like delineation of character, a bright and dramatically constructed dialogue, a skilfully conducted action.

Eventually the farce carries away and absorbs all the other comic styles, including the morality itself, nor does it disappear entirely with the age that produced it, but after persisting at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, it underlies the work of Molière.

No more than the Miracles and Mysteries, were the comedies of the Middle Ages performed by professional actors. The most celebrated merry Brotherhoods in Paris were those of the *Clercs de la Basoche*, who more particularly acted farces and moralities, and of the *Enfants sans souci*, or *Sots*, dressed in green and yellow motley, with fool's cap and bells, who performed the *soties*. There were similar companies in the provinces, notably at Dijon, Lyons and Rouen. In every town of any importance, the clerks, artisans, and students formed associations for the purpose of representing witty and satirical plays on stated holiday occasions.

V

THE FIRST HALF OF THE 16th CENTURY

All the germs contained in this transitional period were stimulated and developed by the Renaissance, and by no means stifled as is often erroneously believed.

There is a general tendency to look upon the Renaissance as a revival of Antiquity. This is not true as regards France or at least it is neither exact nor complete. The An-

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cients were known and appreciated in France, where they were both read and admired. But there was a lack of discrimination as to what was fit to be admired and borrowed,

what was useful and necessary for the development of the French genius.

Italy imparted to France the sense of art in life and literature.

The coming together of France and Italy was effected in the latter part of the 15th century, when on five or six occasions within a period of some thirty years the tide of French invasion overran the Italian territory with the armies of Charles VIII, Louis XII and François I, and ebbed back to France. By about the year 1525, the penetration of the mind and civilisation of Italy into the French mind and civilisation was complete: every germ borne in the race was fructified thereby.



FRANCIS I LISTENING TO THE READING OF A TRANSLATION
OF DIODORUS OF SICILY

Antoine Macault, author of the translation, is shown reading his work to the King. This engraving forms the frontispiece of the printed volume (1535).

1. The Confusion of the several Tendencies : Clément Marot.

The first stage of the French Renaissance is characterised by general confusion. Scholars and poets congregated round François I, and more particularly round his sister, **Marguerite de Navarre** (1492-1549.) This charming princess aptly designated as the "Marguerite des Marguerites", and who, fills an important place in the history of the ideas and letters of the 16th century, united in her own person the poetic faculty, mysticism, literary culture and moral zeal. A woman of wit, with a turn of mind both earnest and sprightly, she was attracted by everything new. Faithful herself to the Roman Catholic creed, though not without a certain leaning towards the Reformation, she never failed to use her powerful influence over her brother, François I, to intercede with him in favour of all whom their bold freedom of thought was calculated to imperil : Marot, Rabelais, Calvin, Etienne Dolet, Robert Estienne. Marguerite gathered about her a whole literary circle. She herself wrote in prose and in verse : a collection of tales, the *Heptameron*, in imitation of Boccaccio's *Decameron* : a collection of poetical effusions, the *Marguerites de la Marguerite des Princesses*.

The example of one of the Princess's secretaries is a striking illustration of the general character of her scholarly, bold and witty little Court. **Bonaventure Des Périers**, born in the year 1500, was in 1532 gentleman of the bed-chamber to Marguerite. With Lefebvre d'Étaples he participated in the translation of the Bible ; with Dolet, in the compilation of the *Commentaires de la langue latine*. Concurrently he composed dialogues in the style of Lucian's and a number of tales. The earliest of these productions bears the enigmatical title of *Cymbalum mundi* — the Chimes of the World (1537). It comprises four dialogues in which Mercury, Cupid, and Actæon's dogs appear in company with imaginary characters. But this mythological garb serves merely as a cloak for bold sallies, the character of which cannot be mistaken. The book is supposed to be written by one Thomas du Clénier (Incrédule) to his friend Pierre Tryocan (Croyant), that is to say by Doubting Thomas to Peter the Believer. It is a piece of raillery levelled not against any religion in particular, but against one and every religion. Small wonder if Des Périers had every one against him : Marguerite herself forsook him ; he was reduced to abject poverty and eventually committed suicide, or so at least it is reported.

His best work was published after his death : it was entitled *Récréations nouvelles et joyeux devis* (1558). It is a collection of one hundred and ten very short tales. They are representative of the bourgeois spirit, just as those of the Queen of Navarre represent the aristocratic spirit. Every one of them deals almost

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exclusively with characters taken from the people. Des Périers tells any tale that he considers to be entertaining, without ever troubling to point the moral, or using it for the purpose of conveying veiled satire. This is in the true French tradition. Nor does any one in the 16th century excel des Périers as a *conteur*. His are the gifts of swift narrative, of directness and unaffected simplicity of style.

It was in this same Court of Marguerite's that blossomed forth the originality, the graceful charm and native ease of **Clement**

Marot (1497-1544).

He makes a point of telling us that he wasted his youth in the schools. The Court, he says, was his "school teacher". He was eminently fitted moreover to be the poet of princes, to give pleasure to the great, and especially to the fair ladies: he had the nimble versatility of a talent prompt to seize upon the social and political events of the hour, ingenuity, a fanciful imagination, a ready wit. By force of circumstances, however, his life was a somewhat agitated, nay even a tormented one. Hesitating between Roman Catholicism and the Reformation, distrusted in both camps, fleeing from



CLÉMENT MAROT

After a XVIth century engraving.

Court to Court and eventually driven forth by the intolerant Republic of Geneva, where he had sought refuge, he repaired to Turin and there he died.

He was impelled by all these untoward happenings to seek his inspiration in the eternal sources of true poetry — grief, the yearning for his lost country, remorse — and to plead eloquently for himself as against his adversaries. Yet even in his complaints and fulminations he remains true to himself. In prison and in exile he preserves sufficient freedom of thought and mind to scoff at his adventures. He never treats any subject seriously and thoroughly. He makes a jest of everything. Quite out of his depth in sacred poetry (*Psaumes, Oraisons*), mediocre as a writer

of elegies, pleasing in the ballad and the roundelay, masterly in the epigram, he excels in the humorous epistle, where he has no superior. Marot's epistles mark the advent of a practically new quality in literature : they show pure wit, the art of putting things prettily, of telling a story with inoffensive malice, of asking for help without seeming to do so, of obtaining forgiveness for one's mockery by laughing at one's own shortcomings, all with the politeness acquired in society, the unaffected gracefulness to be found among gentlefolk, the clear and unequivocal mode of expression which is the politeness of the writer.

Marot's poetry is that of a transitional age. In his early essays (*Adolescence Clémentine*, 1529), he collects the medieval allegories. Next he gives us a rejuvenated version of the *Roman de la Rose*, and an edition of Villon's works. In the best of his compositions, he allows himself to be carried away by the defects of the age : a fondness for alliteration, for puns, for childish artifices in the matter of rhyme. As against this, the breath of the Renaissance is felt to infuse his verse. Marot translated Vergil and Ovid ; these, at times, he imitated felicitously, and the epistle is also a form borrowed from the Ancients.

2. Rabelais.

From 1535 to 1550 the movement of the age begins to assert itself, the heterogeneous elements separate, the various currents are discernible. The practical and positivist tendencies of the French genius direct literature towards moral or scientific truth, wherein it finds support from the northern races in England, in Flanders, above all in Germany. The Reformation disengages itself from the Renaissance. The various branches of science drop away in turns : moral man is now the only subject left for literature proper to deal with. Two outstanding names, Rabelais and Calvin, each in his own sphere, may be held to sum up the literature of the period under consideration.

Legend — the legend of the " Jovial priest of Meudon " — has seized upon the life of **Rabelais** (1500?-1553) and distorted his character, for the simple reason that a literal interpretation has been placed upon the allegories of " Pantagruelism ", that stupendous hungering after knowledge that is a characteristic of his age, and in his particular case amounted to absolute intellectual gluttony. Now Rabelais was anything but a jovial drinker : the life he led was that of a scholar, hard-working and respectable. He was duly ordained, left the convent, passed his degree as medical doctor (1537), followed Cardinal du Bellay to Rome, and never ceased to number powerful patrons among cardinals, princes and even kings.

His romance is but a transformation of the popular romance of adventure ; it supplies the framework in which the author

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displays the treasures of his erudition and his ideas of reform. He had published at Lyons, in 1532, an amended version of a popular romance, the *Grandes et Inestimables Chroniques du grand et énorme géant Gargantua*. Of this work, he tells us, "more

copies were sold within two months than of the Bible in the space of nine years". Enlightened by such success, Rabelais borrowed from this publication the theme of his romance.

The first four books (1532-1552) relate the adventures of the giant Gargantua and his son Pantagruel, the enquiry conducted by Panurge with a view to knowing whether he is to marry and his journeyings in quest of the oracle of the "Divine Bottle".

The fifth book—a posthumous publication—the *Isle Sonnante* (1563-1564) contains virulent attacks upon Rome (the *Isle Sonnante*) and the Judiciary (the *Chatz Fourrés*). This work is by no means authentic. It is a Huguenot pamphlet, borrowing its frame from Rabelais and perhaps utilising some rough sketch of



PRESUMED PORTRAIT OF RABELAIS

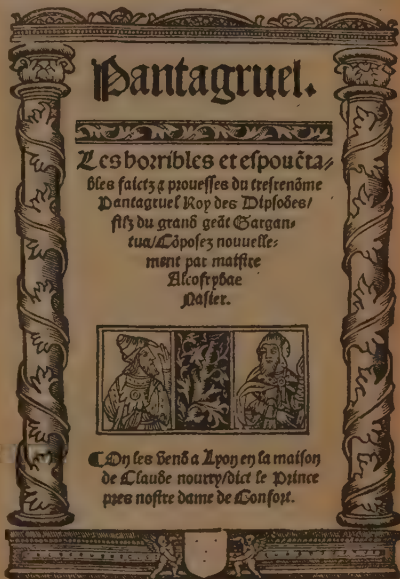
After an anonymous picture (Geneva Library).

his, but in it there is no trace of his characteristic traits: his broad-minded raillery, ludicrous yet measured, his hearty laughter. This biting satire is the work of another man and another age.

If Rabelais had written but the first two books (*Pantagruel*, 1532—*Gargantua*, 1533), he would properly belong to the preceding period. In it, indeed, Rabelais is the intellectual contemporary of Marguerite and Marot, all impregnated with Antiquity and Christianity, and nowise concerned with choosing between tendencies, the still recent admixture of which was looked upon in the light of a splendid enrichment of the individual. But the

year 1535 is a decisive date. Events compel King François I to make his choice : he declares himself resolutely against the Reformation. From that time onward the hitherto intermingled elements begin to separate in France. Calvin is about to publish his *Institution chrétienne* (1536), Rabelais is preparing his "tiers livre". In this third book already (1546) and still more so in the fourth, the "quart livre" (1548 and 1552), are seen to assert themselves, under the boldness of his satire and doctrine, the apology of nature and instinct, the claim to the free development of every faculty of the mind and body, the opposition in fact of Physis, the good mother, to Antiphysis, the fount and origin of every vice, of every evil.

Taking into account these general tendencies of his, it is easy to understand the importance attached by Rabelais to education. To his mind, education must consist solely in the art of ensuring the natural and complex development of the individual.



FRONTISPIECE OF RABELAIS'S "Pantagruel",
in the edition of 1532.

The original editions of "Pantagruel", as may be seen from this example, were printed in Gothic characters. Translation of the title: *Pantagruel*. The horrible and frightful deeds and exploits of the very renowned Pantagruel, King of the Dipsodes, son of the great giant Gargantua. Recently composed by Master Alcofrības Nasier' (anagram of François Rabelais).

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Hence the cyclopædic range of his programme : letters, sciences, arts, all the knowledge of the scholar, all the exercises of the gentleman. Hence too his dream of an ideal city wherein the intellectual élite should find unbounded leisure and independence (*Abbaye de Thélème*).

Rabelais is a mighty artist, the breadth of whose realism equals that of Nature and Life.

His vocabulary is marvellously extensive, and borrowed from the Latin, from the early French authors, from the contemporary dialects and patois. Purity of taste must not be looked for in Rabelais. But no writer ever excelled him in the command of words, in picturesqueness and energy. The variety of his style ranges from the most lofty eloquence to the buffoonery of dialogue — unfortunately, indeed, to the coarsest vulgarity. There are scenes in his book that attain to the level of the best comedy ; he created living characters, and contributed more than any other French writer to prepare the way for Molière.

The greatest reproach one might feel tempted to level at Rabelais, though he can be held but partly responsible for the fact, is that he pointed the way to the "Rabelaisian" school of literature. The success of *Pantagruel* let loose a flood of facetious literature and gave birth to a number of effusions in which but very few of Rabelais' qualities are to be found. Among these imitators, Noel du Fail is worthy of being mentioned for the sake of the picture he has left us of rustic life, of the manners and character of the peasants of his age.

3. Calvin.

There is between the minds of Rabelais and Calvin (1509-1564) a contrast that is manifest in their very features : the former has the pleasingly strong and open face of an honest scholar, the second the hard sharp profile of an acrimonious dialectician. Calvin is a logician, given over entirely to the one idea and intractable in the matter of argument. He found nothing better to set up as against the Roman Catholic dogmatism than a Protestant dogmatism, not a whit less rigorous and rigid than the other. He is far too convinced of being the bearer of truth to admit in others that liberty of which he himself claims to be the champion, while limiting its use to the establishment of the new doctrine. He fully intends the reformation he is bringing about to be a final one and has no other design but to substitute one orthodoxy for another. This 16th century theologian is a precursor in spite of himself.

His education was that of a humanist : he studied theology, but also law and Greek. The first edition of his work, the *Institution Chrétienne* (1535) is in the Latin tongue, and admirable in its classical correction, while the method is the very

expression of the Renaissance spirit, both in respect of the importance attached by the author to the investigation of human nature, and as regards his respect for the ancient text and the critical faculty he displays in his exegesis. We find in it already the method adopted in modern controversy and apologetics. But if the *Institution* transgresses the limits of the Humanities, it marks the final separation of two currents that had hitherto intermingled and were still intermingled in the first two books of Rabelais, setting forth the conception of the Goodness and Almighty Power of God, as made manifest in the goodness and power of Nature.

Calvin's position is that Nature is corrupt, that evil has come into it and that Faith alone, while accounting for human corruption, can supply the remedy. As

against the scoffers, he maintains that man is wicked, that human nature must be repressed and not given free play; to the Roman Catholics he declares that no reliance can be placed in mere indulgences, practices and works, that the Christian's one and only hope resides in the whole-heartedness of his faith, the annihilation of his own will and his complete subjection to the Will of God.

To uphold this contention, it was necessary for the theologian to become a psychologist and a moralist. Calvin thus proves

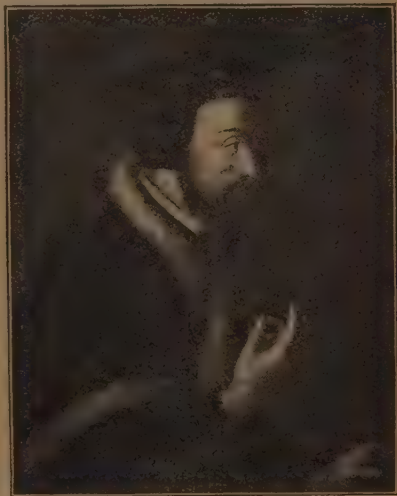


Photo Boissonnas.

PORTRAIT OF CALVIN

A painting on wood, preserved at the Geneva Library.

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himself the initiator of the great classical French tradition: he foreshadows Montaigne, Pascal and Bossuet. Like these he feeds his mind upon the wisdom of the Ancients, to which he superadds his own experience

As a writer also Calvin is an initiator. He is the first to expound in the vulgar tongue matters for which the Latin tongue alone had hitherto been considered as fit and proper, thus enriching it by the whole Biblical and theological treasure. His book is perhaps the first composition worthy of the name to have been written in French. The style is firm, now ample, now concise and abrupt, sometimes trivial, often eloquent, but invariably grave, and so devoid of grace and softness that Bossuet pronounced it to be " gloomy ".

VI

THE CULT OF ANTIQUITY — THE PLEIAD

1. Scholars and Translators : Amyot and Plutarch's Lives.

From 1500 onwards, Antiquity is all the fashion in France. In the works it has bequeathed to us, the 16th century does not merely admire the models of an art carried to perfection : it believes that the Ancients have said the last word upon every subject, science included. The Latin authors are widely printed, learned editions thereof are published. The Greek language, of which the Middle Ages are so ignorant, is revealed by Budé and by Lefebvre d'Etaples. The first Greek book was printed in 1507. Dictionaries and grammars are written, but especially translations. In the early years of the century Claude de Seyssel translated Diodorus, Xenophon and particularly Thucydides. In 1556, Pierre Saliat gave a translation of Herodotus, dedicated to King Henri II. We shall see that the other poets of the Pleiad translated Greek plays, but it was **Jacque Amyot** (1513-1593) who raised translation to the dignity of a literary " genre " with *Théogène et Chariclée*, a Greek romance by Diodorus of Sicily, *Daphnis et Chloé*, the celebrated pastoral by Longus, and above all with *Plutarch's Lives* (1559).

It was a happy thought, at a time when human energy was displaying itself in its every shape and form, to select for the purpose of vulgarisation these biographies of the greatest men of Greek and Roman Antiquity : warriors, statesmen, legislators, orators. It was a stupendous collection of examples from which all might derive profit. It was also an inexhaustible fund of anecdotes, short tales, jests, witticisms and maxims. To all these Amyot imparted a simple and artless turn, which served all

the better to bring out the greatness of the deed or thought, and invested heroism with an appearance of natural ease calculated to attract all "polite people".

This translation exerted a considerable moral influence upon the second half of the 16th century by shaping the course of humanism in the direction of psychology, but likewise a prodigious literary influence — as witness Montaigne himself — by implanting in the vernacular all manner of new words, necessary to express so many diverse conditions, and above all by imparting to the language the suppleness and easy grace it had lacked until then.

2. The Cult of Art: the Pleiad and their Manifesto.

While literature as a whole evolves towards the establishment of an ideal of practical life and takes on a moral character, a great effort is made to raise poetry to artistic excellence of form : this is effected by Ronsard and the **Pleiad**.

In the middle of the 16th century, a literary group, affecting lofty disdain for its past productions, set to work to renovate French poetry. To this effect, its members applied themselves to the direct and practically exclusive imitation of the Latin and Greek masterpieces, the last of which erudition was engaged in bringing to light. Their undertaking was carried out methodically : after a close study of the ancient models, they conceived an ideal of literary beauty which they published in their manifestoes, and eventually strove to embody in their works.

Pierre de Ronsard, the promoter of this movement, was sixteen years old and had for some little time laid aside his page's attire, when an illness that made him deaf cut short his career as a gentleman in the service of princes and gave a poet to France. With a young friend of his, Antoine de Baif, he eagerly devoted himself to study, under the guidance of Daurat, the headmaster of a Coqueret College. He infused his masters with his own enthusiasm, while so filling them with admiration for his personal genius, that they predicted he would be the Homer of France. Presently the movement attracts new recruits, it grows in numbers and strength ; the "Brigade" has become the Pleiad, it is about to start its campaign.

The last comer, **Joachim du Bellay**, was at the same time the most impatient of the band : in February 1549 he issued the *Défense et Illustration de la langue française*. That noisy manifesto inveighs both against the ignorant poets who allow the language to become poorer every day, and against the scholars who prefer to write in Latin. If the French language, it contends, is not sufficiently "copious and rich", all the more reason not to abandon it to its fate, but to labour at enriching it by the

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invention of new words, the revival of old ones, the use of technical terms and new modes of expression.

The enrichment of the language is to be accompanied, or rather preceded, by the renovation of the "genres" and inspiration. There is to be a resolute breaking away from the past. In the place left free by the old French poems will be installed the "genres"

renewed from Antiquity : the epigram, the elegy, the ode, the satire, the eclogue, tragedy and comedy, the sonnet — "a learned and pleasing Italian invention" — and above all the epic poem. To revive the inspiration capable of filling these frames, resort should likewise be had to the Ancients, to Latin and Greek literature. Imitation, however, must neither be superficial nor servile. The thing is to choose the best authors, to "read, mark, learn and inwardly digest" them, thus converting them into flesh blood and.

Du Bellay's manifesto ushered in the militant period, which was a short one. In 1553 **Melin de Saint-Gelais** himself, an out-and-out champion of the old school, dedicated a flattering sonnet to the leader of the new and broke

off his war of epigrams. To the recruits of the earlier stage were added conversions which might easily have been foreseen, such as that of Jean Bouchet, who faithfully transmitted to the Pleiad the traditions of the rhetoricians, and that of **Thomas Sibilet**, whose *Art Poétique*, published in 1548, is the code, or rather the testament of the school of Marot. The whole of the Lyons school, notably **Héroet** and **Maurice Scève**, joined the movement.

From this time onwards the Pleiad reigned supreme : they made the drama their own property, they recast all the literary



PORTRAIT OF JOACHIM DU BELLAY

After a pencil drawing of the XVIIth century
(Bibl. Nat.).

styles, and imposed their theories and their productions on the admiring multitudes.

8. Ronsard.

Few glories ever equalled that of their leader, Ronsard (1524-1585). He was consulted by Tasso, who submitted to him the first cantos of his *Jerusalem Delivered*. Brantôme heard him placed above Petrarch, even in Venice. Queen Elisabeth and Mary, Queen of Scots, vied with each other in loading him with costly presents. He was the Court favourite and Pierre Lescot gave him pride of place by carving on the Louvre pediment, opposite the Monarch's Glory, the poet's Muse in the act of raising to her mouth the trumpet of the *Franciade*. Then it was that Ronsard, intoxicated with his own celebrity, felt himself justified in crying out to all the poets of his age :

" You are my subjects and I am your lord.

This literary supremacy lasted down to the reign of Henri III, who affected to prefer Desportes to Ronsard, while the Protestants and a considerable part of the public



THE POET RONSARD

After the bust which formerly stood on his tomb, but is now in the Blois Museum.

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set up a rival to him in the person of Du Bartas. He had outlived most of his followers and he died just in time (December 27th, 1585) not to outlive his own glory.

There is indeed in Ronsard's work no small proportion of the artificial and conventional. His *Amours* (To Cassandra, To Marie, To Hélène) have the great defect of lacking sincerity. They were taken seriously by his contemporaries, yet they are mere pretexts for versification. The only idea that really inspires Ronsard is the fleeting nature of enjoyment and the melancholy aftermath of regret. We have the clear perception that if he harked back to Antiquity, it was not merely of a set purpose, but by the natural bent of a thoroughly pagan imagination. It follows that his horizon was a restricted one. Like the Ancients, he was a man of few ideas and his poetry is chiefly concerned with the outward aspect of things. His *Eglogues* are likewise conventional effusions. High personages under borrowed names converse in a language unsuited to their condition. But in these artificial frames he sets pictures that possess colour and truth.

Ronsard's main ambition was to soar to the height of those great literary productions with which French poetry was as yet unacquainted: the ode and the epic. This was his most cherished ideal, the one he strove to realise before all others and which haunted him throughout his lifetime. In his *Qdes*, he purposed to be the French Pindar. He succeeded but partially. He produced a number of very beautiful fragments, but there is an absence of general inspiration, still more so of ideas. Ronsard strove also to be the French Homer. The Pleiad was particularly anxious to give birth to an epic. Du Bellay makes a pompous appeal for the advent of the future epic poet. To him above all shall it be given, he declares, to enrich the language definitely and make it the equal of the Latin and the Greek. Ronsard, who harboured the same ideas — or delusions, perhaps — had in mind his *Franciade*, as early as 1550, and it was only after twenty-two years' work that he published the first four cantos (1575). The poem was intended to number twenty-four: it remained unfinished.

The subject was ill chosen. Everybody, even among the most learned scholars, had ceased to take the slightest interest in the mythical Trojan origin of the French nation which connects France with Francus, the son of Hector. In Gaul, the legend dated back to the Roman Conquest. In the 7th century, Frédégaire, the Merovingian historian, transferred it from the Gauls to the Franks, while it was popularised in the 12th century by the success of the *Roman de Troie*. It had recently been taken up moreover by Jean Le Maire de Belges in his extensive compilation, the *Illustrations des Gaules et singularités de Troie* (1509-1513), whence Ronsard took the subject of his epic.

Again, Ronsard, who makes such effective use of the alexandrine, was unaccountably ill-advised in giving his preference in this case to the decasyllabic metre, which is entirely unsuitable for an epic. Nevertheless, though the *Franciade* is properly speaking not an epic, it is far from being devoid of merit. It marks a return to the true well of epic poetry, to Homer, whom the Middle Ages had neglected in favour of worthless compilations. The work is captivating by reason of its unlaboured style : it contains many a pleasing detail.

Ronsard's originality stands out most clearly where perhaps he strove after it the least ; in his *Discours sur les misères du temps*. Here indeed he expresses in admirably forceful language the mental anguish of a Frenchman whose heart is wrung by his country's woes, and reveals himself as a great satiric, political and patriotic poet. He throws open to poetry the whole field of reality, thus divesting it of artifice to bring it into contact with the world and with life itself, wherein he teaches it to find perfection of form.

Ronsard was truly, as he longed to be, and conformably to the Pleiad's design, a literary renovator. He renewed the subject matter of modern lyricism and produced its earliest masterpieces. But he is especially a renovator in the matter of form. His language, while thoroughly French, is invested with unprecedented brilliancy. He did marvellously good work as a writer of verse. It was he who finally imposed the rule of the alternation of masculine and feminine rhymes. He was furthermore a great creator of rhythm — the originator notably of the fine decasyllabic lyrical stanza. His sonnets are nearly all first rate. Ronsard was a great artist and one of the masters who made French poetry what it is.

4. The School of Ronsard.

After Ronsard **Du Bellay** (1525-1560) is the most distinguished poet of the Pleiad. He is even honoured as a predecessor of Ronsard not only by his *Défense*, but by his volumes in verse, the *Olive* and the *Recueil* (1549). Not that the poet's real glory resides in these early productions, which smack too much of affectation and Petrarchism. By a trip to Italy, where he felt like an exile, he was inspired to write the *Regrets* and the *Antiquités de Rome* (1558), choosing the highly artistic form of the sonnet wherein to express his emotions. The inspiration reveals a sweet and refined poetical nature. In picturesque sonnets he gave fitting expression to the somewhat gloomy beauty of the Roman ruins and the splendour of Italian scenery. In satirical sonnets he ridiculed or stigmatised the corruption and scandals of Roman society, while in elegiac sonnets of all-pervading sweetness he voiced his

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regretful memories of his native land, of the "petit Liré" and "the sweet loveliness of Anjou". Du Bellay, who is one of the masters of the sonnet, likewise handled other metres very skilfully. He wrote some delightful songs, as for instance the *Vanneur de blé*.

Jean-Antoine de Baïf (1532-1589) was held up to ridicule both for his attempt to write in a metre copied from Latin verse and for the design wrongfully imputed to him of forming his comparatives and superlatives after the fashion of the Latins: "Docte, doctieur et doctime Baïf". The truth of the matter is that he aimed at and acquired a profound erudition and abused his knowledge of Antiquity even more than Ronsard himself. He was a prolific writer, yet not one of his works is of the first order. But he was a keen inquirer, animated with lofty ambitions. He possessed some of the qualities that go to make up a great artist: wealth of vocabulary and a realistic taste for popular words and modes of expression; a plastic imagination, capable of moulding shapes and attitudes with firmness. His *Mimes* class him among the precursors of La Fontaine, on the one hand, and of the moral poets of the 17th century, on the other.

Rémi Belleau (1528-1577) gave an accurate and elegant translation (1554) of the *Anacreontic Poems*, which Henri Estienne had just published. The *Bergeries*, of which that exquisite song *Avril* was one, earned for him Ronsard's commendation as a "painter of Nature". In his *Pierres précieuses*, he is a continuator of the old writers of Lapidaries, while exhibiting a refined and supple art to which they were utter strangers.

The School of Ronsard made a bold effort to acclimatise the ancient drama in France. The humanists — Buchanan, Muret — had started by giving translations or imitations in Latin of some of the most celebrated Greek plays. The colleges provided both the actors and the public. Others again, of whom Lazare de Baïf was one, produced translations into French of the *Electra* of Sophocles, (1537), the *Hecuba* of Euripides, etc. After the publication of du Bellay's manifesto and almost concurrently with Ronsard's *Odes*, appeared in 1552 **Jodelle's** *Cleopatra*, which was acted by the author and some friends of his at the Hôtel de Reims, in the presence of Henri II. A *Dido* followed shortly afterwards. Jodelle himself had several imitators: from 1552 onwards, tragic poets and tragedies increased and multiplied. Yet it would be untrue, in one sense, to contend that the Pleiad founded French tragedy. The year 1552, a date so pompously celebrated by Ronsard and all Jodelle's circle of friends, does not mark a revolution in the dramatic art: it merely ushers in a period of activity during which many other tragedies and comedies, pastorals, tragi-comedies, and all manner of productions of the ancient or of the Italian type, were represented in

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France, either in the palaces and in the mansions of the nobility, or in private houses, in colleges, and even — as was the case with the Mysteries and Moralities — on raised platforms set up in the streets or public squares. Many plays were never acted for lack of patrons to bear the expenses of staging them ; they were merely printed. Not that these are to be reckoned among the least known or the least literary. The tragedies actually represented did not display the same concern for regularity and style. The mass of the public imposed their tastes and habits upon the new theatre, from which they demanded what stirred them in the old : pathos and movement. The dramatist chose as his theme some deed of violence rather than of celebrity, and began to take his subjects from the romances. He set every rule at naught. The unities were discarded. The plays were lengthy " tales ", frequently recording the whole life history of some prince or other hero. Trivial or facetious " episodes " were introduced and developed side by side with scenes of horror. Among the contemporaries of Shakespeare, there is to be found something that would be very similar to Shakespeare's drama but for the absence of genius. And genius was lacking because this is neither the matter nor the form wherein the French genius can blossom forth.

VII /

THE PERIOD OF THE CIVIL WARS : THE CONFLICT OF IDEAS AND PASSIONS

1. General Characteristics. Treatises and Memoirs.

France, in which Protestantism had gathered strength without succeeding in obtaining the mastery, and which was already sufficiently conscious of its national unity not to allow itself to be torn asunder by religious dissensions, was one of the main battlefields disputed by the Roman Catholic Church and the Reformation. The struggle was all the fiercer inasmuch as the fanatical passions were both embittered and exploited by private interests and selfish considerations : the nobility took advantage of the opportunity to aim a last threatening blow at encroaching royalty and entertained under the label of Protestant or Catholic old grudges and ambitions dating back to feudal times. But the chief element to be taken into account is the line of conduct of individuals, the one rule and end of whose activities was the putting forth of all their energies, not so much for the purpose of ensuring the triumph of Calvinism or Roman Catholicism, as with a view to self-aggrandisement and the accumulation of wealth.

This was a time of specialisation : philosophy, with **Ramus**,

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branches off from literature proper; while erudition, with **Henri Estienne** and **Etienne Pasquier**, and science, with **Ambroise Paré** and **Bernard Palissy**, remain so intimately bound up with man, his tastes, inclination and curiosity, that it is impossible not to take an interest in books constituting, as it were, the diary of his intellectual adventures and more in the nature of personal memoirs than scientific treatises.

In the 16th century, memoirs begin to multiply; practically all of them make pleasant reading, some are first-rate. The men of this age were gifted with a strong personality, and animated by keen passions and overweening ambitions; they were much given to writing about themselves. And the public took a special delight in such tales; nothing appealed to them so much in Antiquity as these "Lives", portraying the souls of the great by the record of their deeds.

François de la Noue, in his *Discours politiques et militaires* charms us by his gravity and by entirely new qualities of style; **Blaise de Montluc** (1503-1577), in the *Commentaires* he dictated about 1570, pleases us by a soldierly abruptness, a graphic abundance of detail, a native insight that makes him skilled in interpreting acts, gestures and words, and an accumulated experience that enables him to read the very conscience of his fellow men.

Brantôme (1534?-1614), in his *Vies des capitaines illustres* and his *Vies des dames illustres*, written from 1590 onwards, reduces history to the level of a collection of anecdotes, but also delineates the individualism of the age.

2. Controversial Poetry : Agrippa d'Aubigné. — Du Bartas.

Poetry is indebted to the keenness of civil strife for some of its best productions. The great defect of the Pleiad, as we have seen, was imitation and artificiality, and it was by no means an evil that the poets should be called back to current events, encouraged to live the life of their age, to draw from their inmost souls the emotions common to all contemporary souls. The high import of the matters concerning which men were at issue — religion and ethics — imparted to the events of the day the power of stimulating poetry without restricting it, of making it precise without withering it.

Never, as we have seen, was Ronsard better inspired, more simple or more lofty than in his *Discours*.

And while Roman Catholicism found its poet in Ronsard, Protestantism likewise found its lyrical exponent in **Agrippa d'Aubigné** (1550-1630), whose whole life and work are monopolised by religious passion. That Huguenot leader, during the enforced leisure caused by a wound that was long in healing, placed at the service of his irreconcilable hatreds a science of versification de-

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rived from the models set by the Pleiad. His *Tragiques* were not published before 1616 ; but we must needs mention here that masterpiece of lyrical satire, born of the civil wars and conceived in the heat of battle.

The poem is divided into seven cantos, each of which bears a significant title : *Misères, Princes, La Chambre dorée, Les Feux, Les Fers, Vengeances, Jugement*. D'Aubigné's imagination is



THE CREATION OF THE BEASTS

Engraving taken from the " *Semaine* " of du Bartas (1611 edition).

The *Semaine*, which follows the Bible very closely, is divided into seven days. This engraving is placed at the head of the fifth day.

frequently the reverse of lucid : whole passages are confused, obscure and extravagant. The finest pages are disfigured by bad taste. But taken as a whole his work is quickened by a powerful inspiration ; the poet's cries of hatred reach the heights of the sublime.

At the same period, Guillaume de Salluste, sieur du **Bartas** (1544-1590), also tried his hand at religious verse and approved himself a great Protestant poet. His growing celebrity was viewed with some concern by Ronsard, the more so as party spirit chose to extol the author of the *Semaine* at the expense of

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the author of the *Discours*. A descriptive poet above all, in this effusion in which he celebrates the work of the Creation, du Bartas appears to us to-day, for all the superiority derived from his religious enthusiasm, as a rival of Belleau, rather than of Ronsard. His verse is frequently forceful, but he is often lacking in good taste; he is ponderous and stiff. Yet his work remained popular for a long time in Protestant countries: from Milton to Byron it left traces in English poetry, while Goethe speaks of him in terms of enthusiasm. The French taste was more severe upon a poet who had ignored the genius of the language and had contributed by his excesses to discredit the movement of the Pleiad.

3. Eloquence and Polemics: the *Satire Ménippée*.

It was but exceptionally that poetry could benefit by the discord and anarchy of the age, which were highly favourable, on the contrary, to the development of eloquence and polemics.

Religious eloquence attained perfection somewhat later, when the appeasement of the conflict enabled the Christian word to preserve the dignity befitting it. Political eloquence, on the other hand, derives profit from the fortunate coincidence whereby the great models of Antiquity were rendered accessible to orators just when half a century of discord, by weakening the central power, ensured liberty of speech to the various bodies of the State.

The Chancellor **Michel de L'Hospital** (1505?-1573) affords us in his discourses the contrast of an invariably lofty thought with a style that is very simple, familiar in fact, and sometimes tainted with vulgarity or on the other hand overloaded with, erudition. He stands revealed as a great orator in his *Harangue aux Etats d'Orléans* (1560) and his *Mémoires à Charles IX sur le but de la guerre et de la paix* (1568-1573).

Guillaume du Vair (1556-1621), a magistrate who was appointed Keeper of the Seals in 1616 and became Bishop of Lisieux in 1617, was one of the most strenuous upholders of the royal authority and peace. The seven speeches he delivered at the time of the Ligue are marked by a simple and animated eloquence which did not survive the triumph of monarchy. After the establishment of absolute monarchy there was an utter lack of political orators.

Bound up with eloquence are certain polemical writings inspired by the multifarious discussions and controversies and suddenly invested with considerable importance by the keenness of the strife. The most celebrated of these, both at this period and throughout the 16th century, is the *Satire Ménippée* (1594).

This was the manifesto of the "politiques", a term designating the wise and moderate elements that would not ave, a foreigner

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as king of France and contrived to bring about the abjuration of Henri IV. A combination of verse and prose, it was the collective work of no fewer than seven authors — bourgeois, patriots, scholars and wits — Jacques Gillot, Pierre Leroy, Nicolas Rapin, Jean Passerat, Florent Chrestien, Pierre Pithou, Gilles Durand. Its theme is a parody of the "Etiats", or meeting of representatives, held in Paris on January 26th, 1593. The main



THE GRAND PROCESSION OF THE LEAGUE

This engraving, of the same date as the *Satire Menippée*, represents the procession of the deputies of the League (1593). The pamphlet gives a burlesque account of this event. The engraving has a satirical purpose, as the Latin inscriptions show.

portion consists of the speeches ironically attributed to the foremost members of the League. The most important of these discourses — by Claude d'Aubray — not farcical in tone but grave and full of pathos, is a superb piece of eloquence. The *Menippée* might well come to an end with this magnificent conclusion, but it is a satire and as such requires the comic note to be sounded once more. Consequently a few pieces of poetry have been added, the best of which is the *Regret sur le trépas de l'âne ligueur*.

It has been averred that the *Ménippée* caused the gates of Paris to be opened to Henri IV, a result it was not in its power

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to achieve. It did however complete the victory by burying the League under the weight of ridicule. Furthermore it remains to this day one of the works the French genius has most clearly marked with its seal, in that it sets forth moderate ideas with alternate malice and eloquence.

4. Montaigne.

Moderation, practical wisdom, a taste for letters, such are the qualities to be found in the greatest French writer of this period, Montaigne, whose work marks, as it were, the ultimate goal of the 16th century.



PORTRAIT OF MONTAIGNE

After Thomas de Leu's engraving.

“ Michel Eyquem, seigneur de Montaigne”, was born on February 20th, 1533, at the Château de Montaigne, in Périgord. His father, who “ had no knowledge of letters ”, but was “ afire with the new ardour ” and welcomed learned men to his board as “ holy persons ”, saw fit to give the boy so thoroughly classical an education that young Montaigne spoke Latin exclusively until he was six. He was for seven years a pupil at the Collège de Guyenne, then studied law and became a member of his provincial “ Parlement ” (Court of Justice). Here he formed (about 1559), with his colleague

La Boétie, a friendship he has immortalised in his regrets for “ that brother ”, who died in 1563. He married in 1561 and became the father of six daughters, only one of whom grew up. From 1572 onwards, he took pleasure in residing more frequently at his country seat, and spent the greater part of his time in his library, engaged in reading his

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favourite authors, especially the Latin writers, and in self-observation, intent upon his own life and thought.

In these meditations he found the matter for his *Essais*, the first two books of which were published at Bordeaux, in 1580. After this, he set out on a tour through Northern France, Bavaria, Switzerland and Italy. We observe in the diary he kept of his journeyings that he paid but scant heed to his material surroundings, but was more particularly interested in men. He made himself acquainted with their manners and laid in a goodly stock of observations, thus adding to the wealth of his experience, as is shown in his third book (1588). He was Mayor of Bordeaux from 1581 onwards, and during the troubled period of civil war his very moderation caused him to be looked upon as a suspect by every party. He died in 1592, before peace was entirely restored. A new edition of his book was published in 1595 by an ardent admirer, Mlle de Gournay, from a copy bearing extensive corrections and additions in the author's own handwriting. A second copy, annotated likewise, served as a basis for Naigeon's edition (1802); it has been reproduced in the Strowski edition (Bordeaux, 1906).

Montaigne's mind is a positive one, highly distrustful not only of metaphysics, but also as regards the general ideas — political and religious — that are a subject of contention among men. He is a psychologist, who has depicted both his fellow men and himself, with his mutable many-sided nature, in the belief that "every man bears in himself the shape of the human condition". Finally he is a moralist, a counsellor of loving-kindness and indulgence, who bases education upon human intelligence and good taste, and strives to detach man from all that is likely to disturb him.

An upholder of Nature as against every discipline, like Rabelais, Montaigne is of opinion that wisdom requires us to submit to her guidance : " Nature knows what is good for us better than we do." But while Rabelais seeks to free us from constraint and tradition for the sole purpose of stimulating our energies and developing our thirst of knowledge and activity, Montaigne would have us turn to Nature as the hidden well of all moderation and peace of mind.

Education is the school of life : it should therefore be so designed and conducted as to fashion man just as he should be. Knowledge must not be sought after as an end in itself, nor acquired by the sole power of memory. Montaigne is all against that piling up of human knowledge which constitutes the new peril. He likewise proscribes the scholastic methods practised in his time, whereby the student was taught, not, indeed, to reason in accordance with the laws of reason and common-sense, but to apply mere formulæ. The true aim of education is to train the judgment, knowledge being considered as an instru-

LIVRE SECOND.

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de plus vray-semblable, c'est gencialement à chacun d'obeyr
aux loix de son pays, comme l'oracle de Socrates luy auoit
adonné, que c'estoit son deuoir de pectre, n'est autre chose
que le seruir Dieu selon l'usage de sa nation. Et par là que veut
elle dire, sinon que nostre deuoir n'a autre regle que fortune?
La verité doit auoir vn visage pareil & vniuersel. La droiture
& la iustice, si l'homme en connoissoit, qui eust corps & ver-
rable essence, il ne l'attacheroit pas à la conditiō des coustū-
mes de cette contrée, ou de celle là: ce ne seroit pas de la fan-
tastie des Perles ou des Indes que la vertu prendroit sa forme.
Il n'est en subiect à plus continuelle agitation que les loix.
Dépuis que ie suis nay, j'ay veu trois & quatre fois rechanger
celles des Anglois noz voisins, non seulement en subiect, mais
en plus important subiect qui puisse estre, à sçauoir de la reli-
gion. Dequoy j'ay honte & despit, d'autant plus que c'est vne
nation, à laquelle ceux de mon quartier ont eu autrefois vne

la priuée accoutance, qu'il reste encore en ma maison aucunes traces de nostre ancien coulinage. Que nous dira donc en cette necessité la philosophie ? que nous fuyons les loix de nostre pays ? c'est à dire cette mer flotante des opinions, d'un peuple, ou d'un Prince, qui me peindront la iustice d'aucun de couleurs, & la reformeront en autant de villages, qu'il y aura en eux de changemens ^{de passion} d'humour. Je ne puis pas auoir le iugement si flexible. Quelle bonné est-ce, & quelle droiture, que le voyois hier en credit, & que j'ay cru ^{de si bon point} aujourd'hui peu de chose. ^{de si bon point} Ce n'est pas un change, c'est un change d'opinion, d'être devenu vieillesse. Mais ils sont plusieurs, quand pour donner quelque certitude aux loix, ils disent qu'il y en a aucunes fermes, perpetuelles, & immuables, qu'ils nomment naturelles, qui sont empreintes en l'humanité, par la condition de leur propre essence: & de celles là, qui en font le nombre de trois, qui de quatre, qui

Quelle fracture, que le trait 155

2000-2001

A PAGE OF MONTAIGNE'S ESSAYS, from the Bordeaux copy.

This copy is the one which has been used for the Naigou and Strowski editions. The above page gives some idea of the nature and quantity of the corrections and additions made by the author:

The Transition between the 16th and 17th Centuries.

ment. The teacher must have recourse to object lessons, accustom the child to observe and discriminate, take him into company, and extend the field of his experience, first by reading — specially the works of the historians and moralists — and subsequently by travel. Lastly care should be taken to strengthen the body as well as the mind, to teach the child all that a young gentleman should know — riding, fencing, dancing and what not — while remembering to harden him against physical pain. Montaigne's ideal is already what was called later on, in the 17th century, "l'honnête homme", the gentleman.

There never was a book more loosely put together than the *Essais*. Taking his own person as the subject of his work, Montaigne speaks of everything in connection with himself, and of himself in connection with everything. No reliance can be placed upon the heading of a chapter, or even upon the proper following up of an anecdote. Maxims, observations, examples and quotations jostle one another in his writings, the whole being blended together and transformed by the gift of style, the gift of lighting upon the word that expresses and depicts. Montaigne is a creator of words and images, he possesses a perfect genius for detail and graphic expression.

But he is great, above all, as a moralist and because he brought ethics into the domain of literature by means of a masterpiece. Individual and subjective, indeed, as his book may be, the main reason why Montaigne so readily compels our interest in his personality is because in himself he discovers man. What he seeks to find in the books of his library is the knowledge of man, the description of the forms of life, the enunciation of a rule of life. To literature he propounds human nature as the eternal subject of our knowledge and interest. Thereby and in accordance with the purest tradition of French literature, his book is not merely French, but human. Humanity has recognised in him a sample of its common nature, and that is why he was appreciated by his great contemporaries in foreign lands as highly as by his own countrymen. Among those who read him and are indebted to him, we need only mention Bacon and Shakespeare.

VIII

THE TRANSITION BETWEEN THE 16th AND THE 17th CENTURIES

The reign of Henri IV, with the beginning of the reign of Louis XIII, — approximately from 1594 to 1615 — forms an entirely distinct and really important period of the literary history of France. Within the span of those twenty years are

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to be observed the transformation of the spirit of the Renaissance and the formation of the Classical spirit.

1. The Return to Sincerity and Naturalness : **Régnier**.

After the great effort of the Pleiad in view of building up an artistic literature from the very foundations, the reign of Henri IV marks a return to naturalness. The poets belonging to this period throw off constraint. They indulge in a certain looseness of composition, to a diffuse prolixity, which impart to most of their productions a character of facility and nonchalance.

Vauquelin de la Fresnaye (1535-1607), besides his *Forgeries* and his *Idillies*, treating of rustic life, composed a number of moral satires imitated from the Latins, and an *Art Poétique* (1605), wherein he showed that he had understood the necessity of taking up Ronsard's reform and modifying it in order that it should bear fruit. It was his desire that to the imitation of the Latin or Greek authors should be added that of the old French writers. He wished the Christian supernatural to be substituted, as far as possible, for the Homeric and Virgilian. He drew up a record, incomplete here and there, but often very accurate, of the national literature, to which he strives to call attention once again. If Boileau had paid greater heed to the *Art Poétique* of his predecessor, he would not have been guilty of so many inaccuracies and oversights.

Jean Bertaut (1553-1611) bears the impress of his age : he clothes in a fluid and harmonious form an underlying fund of imaginative melancholy. But his verse is apt to be argumentative and is weighed down by moral reflections. His longer productions are styled *Discours* and testify to that evolution of lyricism in the direction of eloquence, which is a characteristic feature of French classicism.

Mathurin Régnier (1573-1613) wasted both his life and his talent. All he could do was to write as fancy moved him, just as he lived according to the inspiration of the hour. His amatory stanzas and his rustic descriptions possess the soft sweetness of the other poems of his age. The originality of Régnier's genius lies in the portrayal of manners. He has a peculiar clearness of vision, and renders with extraordinary power and life-like relief the features, attitudes and sayings of the people he met. He derives and he imparts the comprehension of the moral through the physical ; he seizes upon the passing gesture or intonation that serves to reveal a character or a profession. His natural gifts inclined him therefore towards satire, of which the theory

P A R I S



VIEW OF PARIS UNDER LOUIS XIII, after a contemporary print.

The view is taken from the north. In the background on the left is seen the Montagne de Sainte Geneviève nearer the centre, Notre-Dame, with the Temple in front. In the centre is the Tour Saint Jacques. In the background to the right are the three towers of Saint-Germain-des-Prés or the extreme right, the Louvre and the Tuileries. In the foreground is seen the Hôpital Saint-Louis.

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and sometimes the example had been supplied by the poets of the Pleiad. In this form of verse Régnier finds a suitable frame wherein to set his picture of the age, and he is partial to it as being best adapted to his disorderly and fanciful composition. It is a form moreover that suits that picturesque, graphic and familiar style of his, steeped and revived in the popular spring. If Régnier's form is at times somewhat negligent and involved, it is because he could not, or would not, revise his own work. Careless in temperament and in theory, he attacked in one of his satires the writer who at the time stood up for strict discipline and rules, Malherbe, to whose mind poetry was rather a matter of work and art than of inspiration. Of him we will speak later on, because his far-reaching reform brings us down to the advent of classical art.

2. The Work of Restoration and Regeneration.

The nonchalance affected by the poetry of the age should not make us lose sight, however, of the work of restoration and regeneration, that was preparing the great classical period of French literature, a period distinguished by the highest degree of order.

Olivier de Serres (1539-1619) never loses sight of the national interest in his strenuous activity as a country land-owner. His book, the *Théâtre d'Agriculture et le Ménage des champs* (1600) came as a public boon. Written in a commendable style and with simple gravity, it ranks in literary history mainly as a sign of the times.

A term of exile in England had revealed to **Antoine de Montchrétien** (1575-1621) the dignity attaching to trade and industry, the sources of national prosperity, and he attempted to infuse his enthusiasm into the mind of the young king, Louis XIII. His *Traité de l'économie politique* (1615) is full of life and animation, poetical grace — we shall see later on that Montchrétien was above all a poet — and lusty eloquence. We may discern in it a keen desire for order, peace and justice, an ardent patriotism, an earnest Christianity and deep commiseration for the people.

Pierre Charron (1541-1603) in his *Traité de la sagesse* (1601) imparts to Montaigne's ideas a dogmatic turn of expression and a singularly ponderous form. He utilises them for religious purposes, thus preparing the way for the Christian rationalism that is one of the characteristics of the classical age.

The treatises written by **Guillaume du Vair** (1556-1621), *De la philosophie morale du stoïcisme*, — *Exhortation à la vie civile*, — and more particularly, his *De la constance et consolation es calamités publiques*, in which he has drawn a picture of the revolu-

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tions whereby empires have been destroyed, reminding us of Bossuet's *Histoire universelle*, are the chief productions of the moral philosophy of the age. This magistrate, who died a bishop, already combines in a sort of Christian mysticism all the intellectual wealth of the Ancients with the religious elevation of the Gospel, the two elements, in fact, the perfect fusion of which constitutes the forcible beauty of Christian literature in the 17th century.

The same awakening of moral energy underlies also the flowery amenity of yet another bishop, François de Sales (1567-1622), whose *Introduction à la vie dévote* (1608), written in a charming, picturesque and amiable style is intended to show those who "move in Society and at Court" how piety can be practised in the various conditions of life. He contributes, as well as du Vair, to the diffusion among lay society of that inner and spiritual life which had hitherto been confined to the cloisters.



SCENE FROM L'ASTRÉE

After an engraving in the 1647 edition.

This engraving recalls the pleasant and artificial characters and events that the author places in the delightful rural setting of the Forez.

3. The ideal of society life : l'*Astrée*.

It is an ideal of society life that **Honoré d'Urfé** (1568-1625) proposes to describe in his aristocratic romance, l'*Astrée*, published from 1610 to 1627. The author himself was of noble ancestry. After fighting in the wars of religion on the side of the *ligueurs*, he spent his time partly at his family seat in the Forez district and partly at the brilliant Court of the Duke of Savoy, in the company of François de Sales. The first volume of the *Astrée* was published in 1609 and may have been read by Henri IV. The theme is the love of the shepherd Céladon and the shepherdess Astrée, who after parting in a moment of anger, are engaged in seeking each other through the five thousand pages of this interminable tale. The scene is laid in the Forez, on the banks of the Lignon, in the 4th century of Gaul. The frame is borrowed from the Italian pastorals, which were then in high favour : Tasso's *Aminta*, Guarini's *Pastor Fido* and Montemayor's *Diana*.

It is by no means the author's purpose, however, to pourtray the manners of the rustics. He gives us due warning that his shepherds are gentlefolk enjoying a holiday. As a matter of fact, the whole book is an idealised picture of society life. Nature is extolled not so much for her own sake and for her beauties, as in relation to man and as an environment in which he is better able to indulge in introspective thought and self-observation. For it is the analysis of human sentiments that plays the chief part in the *Astrée*. True, indeed, there is but one sentiment — love — that holds the stage throughout. But is not love both the most universal and the most complex of all sentiments, the one that most effectively brings into play all the springs of the human soul and is best adapted to the laying bare of its inner workings ? It should be added that love, as viewed by d'Urfé, is a thoroughly noble and pure sentiment, almost a mystical one, indeed, and does not attain to perfection from the start. In the mysterious forest, Céladon is instructed by the druid Adamas with regard to the essential beauty and perfection of love. The shepherd's prayer to the goddess Astræa, in that it raises love to the level of devotion, is worthy of the saintly bishop François de Sales, who made devotion sway towards love. In the fluent, diffuse and pleasant prose of the romance may be discerned the inspiration and refined taste of the *Introduction à la vie dévote*.

IX

FORMATION AND DEFINITION OF THE CLASSICAL SPIRIT

1. Reform of the Language : Malherbe and Balzac.

Between the years 1615 and 1636 French classical literature took shape. At the beginning of this period the language was rich but very confused ; the vocabulary had not yet achieved its full precision, nor diction its perfect harmony. What the French language chiefly lacked was unity. The 16th century had produced great writers, each of whom wrote as it were a language of his own. There remained to be written a language that should be not that of some particular prose-writer or poet, but the French language itself.

This task of unification was accomplished by two men possessed of good taste, patience and a capacity for hard work: **Malherbe** and **Balzac**.

François de Malherbe (1555-1628) imparted to the French language propriety, purity and clearness, while subjecting metrical composition to stringent rules.

As opposed to the school of easy naturalness, he proclaimed the necessity of the respect of technique and craftsmanship. He created classical lyric poetry by eliminating the personal sentiments and concerning himself solely with general emotions, the commonplaces of ethics, eternal and impersonal, or such political impressions as he shared with his age. After a number of preliminary attempts, which began as early as 1575 and are still discernible in the first poem he published,



PORTRAIT OF MALHERBE

Painted by Finson in 1613, engraved by Coelemans.

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Les Larmes de Saint Pierre (1537), composed on the model of an Italian poem, he achieved in 1600 or thereabouts the best of his *Odes* and *Stances*, the poetry of which, founded upon reason, is intellectual, rhetorical and moral, while its form is concise, clear-cut and orderly. Some of the lines are already in the manner of Corneille, the thought being enclosed in a short crisp formula.

J.-L. Guez de Balzac (1594-1654) accomplished in prose the same reform as Malherbe did in poetry, endowing it with numerical proportion and harmony. He is a staid and earnest writer, who gave eloquent expression to many a forceful thought relating to politics, morality, religion and literature. Well versed in the study of the Ancients, his aim was to extract from Antiquity none but its classical and eternal elements, or in other words the body of moral ideas that might serve as the guiding principles of life. Like Malherbe, he eliminates all that might be too personal in his thoughts and sentiments. He strives to impart a rational and modern character to the particular facts and emotions of his private life, his opinion being that both in conversation and in writing it is necessary to generalise one's personal impressions in order to be understood by all.

Balzac was successful in his attempt to leave his mark upon his age. He was in the first place a political moralist (*Alcippe*. — *Le Prince*. — *Dissertations politiques*. He was likewise a moralist proper, calling attention, in dissertations or in his letters, to the uncertainty of human affairs, the necessity of bearing death in mind, the happiness of a quiet life. Finally he was a religious moralist (*Dissertations chrétiennes et morales*. — *le Socrate chrétien*. These lofty thoughts it was Balzac's purpose to invest with perfection of form. His originality as a writer resides primarily in balancing fine periods, in the harmonious equipoise of the several parts of a sentence. His *Lettres*, which at one time enjoyed considerable celebrity, are somewhat lacking in ease.

2. The Cartesian Rationalism and the Classical Tradition.

Descartes contributes by his writings to establish the authority of pure reason. It was in his *Discours de la Méthode* (1637) that he summed up, as in a manifesto, his system of philosophy, which is based upon the most complete trust in the reasoning faculty, upon the need of evidence and clearness of thought and expression. The Cartesian philosophy did not create the rationalistic disposition, of which it merely affords the most systematic expression and is itself but an effect.

And that reason, of which he proclaimed the supreme authority and demonstrated the force, was precisely the same faculty

Formation and definition of the Classical Spirit.

Malherbe had endeavoured to set up as the ruling element in literature. Now reason is one, equal and identical in all men. "Common-sense is of all things the most equally distributed." Hence it comes that Descartes writes in the language common to his age and country.

Before him, both philosophers and theologians used Latin exclusively in propounding their doctrines. Descartes, by writing in French, showed that his purpose was to appeal not to philosophers and specialists, but to all who felt inclined to use their own minds. The assertion of the universality of reason encouraged men to pursue a universal object in a work of art as well as in others, to aim at perfection in the general character of the subject under consideration, in the common nature of the pleasure imparted.

But the Cartesian system, by reason of its strictly scientific character, excludes art as such, or reduces

it rather to science, with which it blends it: literature, just like philosophy, should have no other aim but truth. Truth therefore is the supreme object of literary work. Truth and beauty are identical. The Cartesian philosophy would have given birth to none but as scientific literature, reducing expression as it were to an algebraical notation of thought, had not the current of ancient tradition intermingled with the current of rationalism. What the classical spirit values most highly in the Ancients, is the truthful



RENÉ DESCARTES

*After the portrait attributed to Franz Hals.
(Louvre Museum.)*

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quality of their work, its conformity to reason. It turns to them, not so much for models, as for lessons. For this reason its admiration never errs on the side of fanaticism, nor does its imitation become slavish. But independently of their truth, the masterpieces of ancient literature are also possessed of beauty. Thanks



A COMPANY OF LADIES in the XVIIIth century.

This print by Abraham Bosse represents a visit to a lady in her confinement and evokes the bedside receptions ("ruelles") of the early XVIIth century. It was the fashion then among society ladies to receive their women friends reclining on their beds.

to their undying influence, literature remains an art. The wonderful achievement of the classical spirit is precisely to have combined in a harmonious balance beauty of form with the truth of the subject matter.

3. Society : the Hôtel de Rambouillet and the Académie française.

Yet another influence is presently seen to complete, to balance and to correct the Cartesian doctrine, while it moderates and

dominates the influence of Antiquity : this is the influence of "polite society", which for the next two centuries never ceased to pervade French literature. It is in such close conformity with the national temperament that it makes itself felt from the very beginning, as witness in the first place the "courtois "



A MEETING OF THE ACADEMIE FRANÇAISE

towards the middle of the XVIIIth century. After a print by P. Sevin.

The meetings were then held in the hall of a mansion belonging to Chancellor Seguier, patron of the Academy. To avoid disputes about precedence, the Academicians sat round a large table, in forty chairs exactly alike.

lyrics of the 13th century, and later on the chivalric literature, from the Breton romances to Froissart's Chronicles. But it now assumes a new shape : the "salon", where women of society and writers foregathered to discuss serious matters under theegis of a great lady.

The *Hôtel de Rambouillet* (1610-1648) was the first and foremost of these social gatherings, which soon served to extend the influence of woman over literature. It was in 1630 that it began to assume real importance. The "blue chamber" of Arthénice (an anagram of Catherine, the Marquise de Rambouillet's Christian name) was for more than forty years the meeting place of all the distinguished wits of the age. Here the great lords and ladies would meet the writers, the former acquiring the habit of conversing upon serious topics and a taste for intellectual matters, the latter, that politeness and seemly deportment in which they had hitherto been sadly deficient. Here too great progress was made in the purification of the language. Questions

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of language and grammar were in great favour. The rulings of the grammarian Vaugelas were final. Yet Vaugelas was neither a pedant, nor even a man of deep learning. His *Remarques sur la langue française* (1647) are little more than a record of the results of his own observations. The sum and substance of his methods consists in discriminating between fit and unfit usage. Thenceforward the usage obtaining in society and among the great writers became law.

Yet another "salon" was the *Académie française*, an official salon, duly commissioned with the task of watching over the progress of the French language. From the year 1629 onwards, certain men of letters were in the habit of meeting at the house of Conrart. One of these, Boisrobert, spoke of these functions to Cardinal Richelieu, whose interest was awakened, considering as he did that this might be a means of extending to literature that spirit of discipline which he so successfully brought to bear upon politics. In 1635, the assembly was duly incorporated under the name of the *Académie française*. The business of the Académie is to regulate the development of the French language; its main work, the compilation of its famous *Dictionnaire*.

A clear, elegant and pure diction, a taste for general truth and a reasonable imitation of the Ancients, a refined sense of social politeness, such are the chief elements that combined to constitute the classical school of literature and to prepare the way for its masterpieces.

X

HEROIC LITERATURE (1636-1660).

From 1636 to 1660, French literature is characterised by a taste for the romantic and for exalted sentiments, by the portrayal of almost superhuman deeds of valour, revealing the ardour of passion and the compelling force of temperament. The rugged energy of the generations belonging to the 16th century, while tempered by the nobility of the age of Henri IV and by the polished manners of the drawing-rooms, had not entirely disappeared. The impulses of instinct are made manifest in the fulness of their strength, while the thirst for adventure asserts itself in the general taste for fantastic heroism. The ardour of the Fronde is breathed into literature. The extraordinary popularity enjoyed by the *Astrée*, without bringing people back to the somewhat insipid sweetness of romance, accustomed them nevertheless to an idealism highly favourable to romantic exaltation. Finally the chivalrous and violent literature of Spain acted in the same direction and favoured the free expansion of human passions and dreams. This is the characteristic feature common to all the

great works dating from between 1636 and 1660 : tragedy, romance, epics, memoirs and comedy.

1. The Tragic Drama before Corneille.

French tragedy shone with such dazzling splendour, it had become so highly expressive of the national genius in the 17th century, that it is interesting to give here a rough sketch of the history of its origins and to describe with some precision the manner constitution.

The birth of the classical French drama dates back to the famous performances in 1552, at which were represented conjointly, in presence of King Henri II and his Court, the tragedy of *Cléopâtre* and the comedy of *Eugène*, both by **Etienne Jodelle** (1532-1573). In these plays the poet himself acted, with the assistance of his friends and eventual rivals.

The Pleiad did not overestimate the value of these attempts at regular tragedy, which are by no means in the nature of a revolution, but strike us rather as the result of an evolution, if we go back to the translations that had prepared the way, as for instance **Bail's** *Electre* (1537). It has also been stated, not without reason, that the founder of psychological tragedy in France was **Théodore de Bèze**, in whose *Abraham sacrifiant* (1551), the patriarch is torn by the conflict between his paternal feelings and the commandment of Heaven, his soul itself being the scene in which the action is laid. **Loys Desmazes**, again, succeeded in bestowing upon his *David* (1566) certain features that make him lifelike and pathetic, and may be said to impart a unity of interest to his trilogy. This was a genuine and deserving attempt at blending the ancient with the new drama, and one that brought good luck to its author. The same may be said of **Jean de la Taille**. Not one of his contemporaries possessed the dramatic sense to a like degree. His two tragedies, *Saül le Furieux* (1562) and *Les Gabaonites* (1573), are, with the trilogy by Desmazes, to which they are a sequel, the most dramatic and original plays written before *Le Cid*. It is in style, however, that their author is wanting.

This we soon find in **Jacques Grévin**, whose *Jules César* (1553), while lacking the pathos and characteristic features of the above, exhibits powerful situations, eloquently worked out by the author. The rhetorical tragedy is improving in quality.

In his first three tragedies, **Garnier**, differs but little from his predecessors. But his *Marc-Antoine* (1573), his *Troade* (1578), and his *Antigone* (1579) mark a step forward in that they aim at the art of filling out the action by the scenic development of the situations propounded, and of utilising as its mainspring the deep-lying conflict of character and passion. His tragi-comedy

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Bradamante (1580) is, in this respect, remarkable in parts, and his tragedy *Sédécie*, or *Les Juives* (1580), is, taking it all in all, the masterpiece of tragedy in the 16th century : many a trait of eloquence, especially in connexion with the sublime pathos of *Sédécie's* resignation in the dénouement, remind us of Corneille. Yet this tragedy is likewise, on the whole, but a dramatic elegy.

The same designation applies with even greater accuracy to **Montchrétien's** tragedies, not excepting his very best, the *Ecossaise*. This author, however, is entitled to a place by himself. The ordered simplicity of his plots, the clearness and sustained correctness of his style, his studied elegance of expression, allow us indeed to consider his plays as a transition between the tragic drama of the 16th century and the great classical tragedy.

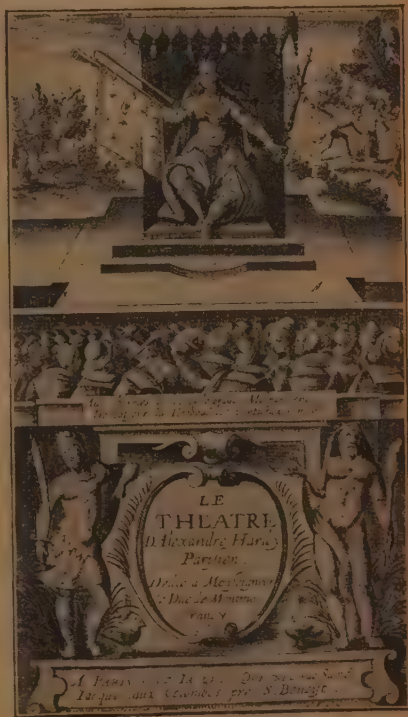
But in all these tragedies of the 16th century, the best-written parts are the choruses, their authors being, like their friends of the Pleiad, essentially lyrical poets and tragic as it were by accident. All things considered, though tragedy already bore in the germ some of its future beauties — unity and simplicity of subject, commencement at the "critical" moment, i. e. when the passions most nearly approximate their acute stage, structural regularity of division into five acts, sustained elevation of tone, an obvious taste for rhetorical tirades and moral maxims — it still languished and hesitated in spite of the generous efforts of the classical school. At this juncture (1599) there came to Paris from the provinces, where he had been vegetating as a member of a company of country actors, an author who was about to write for the public, with no other aim than to attract and to hold it.

Alexandre Hardy was born about 1560. Practically nothing is known of his life, except that he undertook to work for a company of actors, whose inexhaustible provider he was, supplying them with no fewer than seven or eight hundred plays, all in verse. In order to achieve this huge production, Hardy draws upon every available source, Latin, Greek, Italian and especially Spanish ; history, legend and romance provide him with subjects. No style of literature comes amiss to him, whether tragedy, tragic-comedy or pastoral. Nor does he trouble about rules of any description : there are plays of his that cover a period of twenty years ; the scene is transferred from Rome to Athens, from France to Germany, from earth to heaven and to hell. His plays were acted amid " simultaneous " stage scenery, representing several different places, as in the case of the old Mysteries. We possess forty-one of these plays, collected and published by the author. It were useless to seek in them either composition, psychology or style. Yet Hardy already has a certain presentiment of the classical " crisis " ; he knows moreover, like the true dramatist he is, how to bring out the interest and the unity of his characters' sentiments. Last but not least, his plays

have one great quality, movement. Intended for ignorant spectators, indifferent as yet to considerations of art, and whose interest in a drama attaches to the incidents wherewith it is filled, these productions impressed them deeply. Hardy gained a public for dramatic authors.

During the same period, **Théophile de Viau** (1590-1626) composed a pastoral, *Bergeries*, performed in 1619, and a tragedy, the *Amours tragiques de Pyrame et Thisbé* (1617), two ludicrous and oft-quoted lines of which refer to a daggeras "blushing" for its cowardice in soiling itself with the blood of its master.

In the upper part of this composition, Melpomene, the Muse of Tragedy, is figured on a theatrical stage. The spectators are standing, as was the custom, in the pit, and belong to the lower classes. Thus the engraving symbolises Hardy's innovation, for he was the first to make tragedy a popular spectacle.



FRONTISPIECE TO THE THEATRICAL WORKS OF ALEXANDRE HARDY
(1624 edition).

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The play is not so bad as one might be led to believe. Théophile, who was also a lyrical poet, is worthy of commendation for having reintroduced into tragedy the poetry which Hardy was powerless to put into it. But he also added the witticisms and conceits brought into fashion by Cavaliere Marini. Uncertainty as to the road about to be entered upon, confusion of the various "genres", ignorance of the public, such were the external conditions of the dramatic art. In England, similar conditions had favoured the birth of a mighty genius — William Shakespeare. In France, they were too little in harmony with the trend of the national spirit and with the needs that were already making themselves felt in other branches of literature, for any really great work to be produced. In proportion as a public was being formed for the theatre, its taste gradually eliminated from the stage the last traces of the free fancy of the Middle Ages; the demand, on the contrary, was all for "regular" plays, that is conforming to the famous rules of the "unities", with which the more erudite critics and poets had long been acquainted, but that were about to take root in France as the necessary condition of verisimilitude, thus marking the victory of classical rationalism. By confining dramatic poetry within strict limits of space and time, by placing the interest in the moral action and the play of character rather than in physical action, the classical spirit constructed for itself the literary form that was best suited for its expression. Hence the success of French tragedy.

The man who really introduced the unities into France was **Mairet** (1604-1686), who has no other claim to our remembrance.

In 1608 **Jean de Schelandre** had produced a play, called *Tyr et Sidon*. It covered two days and consisted of five thousand lines. In 1626, François Ogier wrote as a preface to this play the most forcible defence that has ever been put forward in support of the irregular drama. He adduces a number of most interesting arguments in favour of dispensing with the time limit, and dwells on the necessity of breaking away from the Ancients and of exhibiting on the stage, as in real life, the mixture of serious and comical elements. To him Mairet replies: he demands unity of action and unity of time: twenty, four hours should be the extreme limit and the chief reason he gives is the necessity of verisimilitude, as already postulated by Scaliger in the 16th century. Unity of time must needs involve unity of place and consequently profound alterations in the system of stage production adhered to at the Hôtel de Bourgogne.

Mairet had — to a certain extent — observed the unities in *Silvanire*, a pastoral tragi-comedy (1629). In 1631 he formulates the classical theory thereof in the preface to a new edition of this play. Finally, in 1634, he put on the stage *Sophonisbe*, the first regular tragedy to be performed. Some of the scenes are worked out artistically, the style is elevated, the Ro-

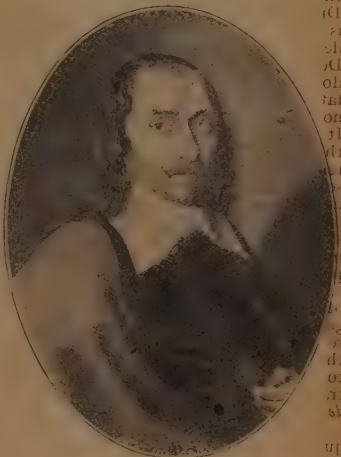
mans as depicted by him use the conventional modes of expression ascribed to them by the 17th century, on Balzac's authority. The path was laid open for Corneille to follow.

2. The Plays of Pierre Corneille.

Pierre Corneille (1606-1684) was the creator of the great French dramatic art. Born in Rouen, the capital of Lower Normandy, he was a brilliant scholar at the Jesuit college of his native city, was called to the Bar in 1624, and came to Paris in 1629, bringing with him a comedy, *Mélite*, which enjoyed a certain measure of success. In this was to be found for the first time a portrayal of the conversation of "polite folk". At that period comedy was apt to be somewhat coarse and ludicrous; it still bordered closely upon the farce. To Corneille belongs the credit of having successfully produced the earliest models of the social and polite comedy.

Five more comedies followed the first, faithful pictures one and all of elegant society. His first tragedy, *Médée*, imitated from the Latin poet Seneca, is dated 1635. But it was by coming into contact with the Spanish literature that Corneille's genius was presently awakened. In the space of one year he derived from it the inspiration of a comedy, *L'Illusion comique*, and of a tragedy, *Le Cid* (1636).

It is generally admitted, and rightly so, that even if he had written nothing but *Le Cid*, Corneille would still deserve to be



PIERRE CORNEILLE

After the portrait engraved by Michel Lasne (1643)

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held as the father of French tragedy. That play embodied the ideal towards which the dramatic art had been gravitating for three quarters of a century : the psychological crisis determined by conflicting sentiments and passions in a vexed and conscious soul. The subject was borrowed from Guilhem de Castro ; but Corneille transformed the play and simplified the action. The latter, instead of spreading over several years, is confined within twenty-four hours. Rodrigue loves Chimène and is about to be married to her, when a quarrel breaks out between the two fathers. Don Gormas, Chimène's father, insults Don Diègue. Rodrigue, in obedience to the code of knightly honour, is compelled to avenge his father, who is too old himself to demand satisfaction for the wrong done to him. He challenges Don Gormas to a duel, in which the latter is slain. Rodrigue has done his duty. Chimène will do hers, which is to prosecute her father's slayer and bring him to punishment. Is the lawful and noble love of the hero and heroine to be sacrificed in consequence ? It is their right to love each other, and their duty not to make themselves unworthy of that love. The whole dramatic interest resides, therefore, in the conflicts and struggles whereby their souls are torn and their wills brought into play. The external happenings are of no importance whatever ; the sentiments of the characters hold our undivided attention. This is the very system of French tragedy, asserting itself for the first time, after many a bungling attempt, in all its forcefulness and by a masterpiece.

Its success was immense. It became a household word to say of a thing that it was "as fine as *Le Cid*". But this very triumph gave rise to a controversy that is still known as the famous "querelle du *Cid*". The rivals of the poet attempted to demonstrate that the play was of no value. Richelieu seized the opportunity to appeal to the Académie française as a court of literary arbitration. He personally supervised the editing of the *Sentiments de l'Académie sur le Cid*.

In all this quarrel, to which envy was certainly no stranger, a question of principle was thus involved. *Le Cid* marked a reversion towards the Spanish school : it was an experimental modern tragedy, with a tendency towards a freer system, and Corneille had gone so far as cautiously to term it a "tragi-comedy". He was attacked in defence of the strict rules and by the out-and-out champions of Antiquity. The observations of the Académie had the effect of turning him back towards regular tragedy and ancient themes. After four years' silence, masterpiece followed upon masterpiece. The genius of Corneille burst upon the world in all its magnificence, giving us admirable pictures of heroism. In a historical frame he works out the development of the more generous passions, such as patriotism (*Horace*, 1640) ; clemency (*Cinna*, 1640) ; self-sacrifice to a divine ideal (*Polyeucte*, 1643).

His characters are truly French souls of the period, aspiring to rule themselves by reason, and guided in their conduct by their will and understanding, rather than by instinct or sentiment. As Voltaire aptly observed, his plays are "a school of magnanimity".

But tragedy, as conceived by Corneille, requires for its development powerful, nay extraordinary situations, affording the will ample scope to assert itself, to increase the energy and therefore the moral value of its effort. It follows that the incidents, or vicissitudes, are apt to be the ruling element in the action, which tends to become complicated and confused. Furthermore, his constant striving after the sublime ended in the unlikely and the extraordinary.

Rodogune (1645) is already an obscure drama. Nevertheless, the wealth and variety of Corneille's genius enabled him to produce further remarkable plays: *Nicomède* (1650), an attempt at an almost exclusively political tragedy, is one of his finest works. It should not be forgotten, moreover, that Corneille led the way in, or at least attempted, practically every style of dramatic production: *Le Menteur* (1643) is the first comedy of character, and was written ten years before Molière; *Andromède* (1650) is an opera, and *Don Sanche d'Aragon*, a "heroic comedy", is very similar to the Romantic drama, of which Victor Hugo's *Hernani* ensured the triumph in 1830.



FRONTISPIECE TO "POLYEUCTE",
in the 1660 edition of the works of Corneille.

Polyeucte and Néarque breaking the heathen idols. This episode is recounted, to Pauline by her confidant (Act III, Scene 2). The costume worn by Polyeucte is an example of the license that was then prevalent in respect to garments imitated from antiquity.

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Corneille is a marvellous writer of dramas in verse. True, his style is unequal, sometimes confused and obscure, pompous to the verge of bombast, strained to the point of absurdity. But he has a gift for oratory and frequently attains to the most lofty eloquence ; he is without an equal in the forceful prosecution of a course of reasoning. Last but not least, he excels in formulating short impressive maxims, in opposing and playing off against each other the crisp repartees of his characters, thus impressing upon his verse a decisive stamp that has since been recognised as essentially his own.

On a lower level than Corneille, mention should be made of a contemporary of his, the poet **Jean de Rotrou** (1609-1650), a warm-hearted man with a venturesome disposition, who led the life of a spendthrift and died the death of a hero in his native town, whither he returned to take up his post as a magistrate during an epidemic. After attempting the romantic drama, he followed the lead of Mairet and turned his attention to the writing of tragedies, the themes of which were borrowed from the Ancients. After Corneille, he tried his hand at the religious drama : his *Saint-Genest* (1646) was inspired by *Polyeucte*. There is much that is beautiful in his tragedy of *Venceslas* (1647).

3. The Romance and the Epic.

The love of grandeur and heroism, characteristic of the whole of this generation, is likewise to be found in the interminable romances that were its special delight, and in the epics, so many of which were written at this time.

The vogue of the heroic romance — practically a continuation of the pastoral romance — had set in as early as 1632 with Gomberville's *Polexandre* and Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin's *Ariane*. It grew with **La Calprenède** (*Cassandre*, 1642-1645; 10 vols; *Cléopâtre*, 1647; 12 vols) and **Mlle de Scudéry** (*Ibrahim ou l'Illustre Bassa*, 1641; *Artamène ou le Grand Cyrus*, 1648; *Clélie*, 1654). La Calprenède's heroes bear a great likeness to those of Corneille : they embody the same conception of love as based upon mutual regard and of the will triumphant. The contemporaries admired them all indistinctly. Madeleine de Scudéry's novels, with their ancient or foreign settings, portray French manners. In *Clélie* is to be found the famous "Carte du Tendre", pleasing and most ingenious trifling, under which may be discerned a somewhat refined analysis of love. The length of this tale, the jumble of adventures making up a series of small minor romances, unconnected either with each other or with the main theme, and the mediocrity of the style exclude these effusions from the domain of literature. Yet they undoubtedly enjoyed a measure of appreciation in high society.

Of all literary productions, the grandest was held to be the epic poem. Its prosperity coincided with that of the heroic romance. There remain of these unreadable works practically nothing but the names, to which are generally attached a few sarcasms of Boileau's. Saint-Amand published a *Moïse sauvé* (1653); Georges de Scudéry, his *Alaric* (1654); Chapelain, the first two cantos of *La Pucelle* (1656); Desmarets, his *Clovis* (1657). All these poems are epics in name only. They are metrical romances, as long and diffuse as those written in prose, and indeed far less readable, because in them the portrayal of manners is replaced by the insipid convention of the marvellous and the allegory. There remains no semblance of reality or truth in these dull compositions, except the lengthy descriptions of palaces and gardens. The style is even inferior to that of the romances, for bad verses are worse than bad prose. Nor would it be worth while to mention such works, but for the fact that they bear witness in their own way to that passion for the heroic which stamps the age of Corneille.

4. The Jansenist Doctrine : Pascal.

The Jansenist spirit, which is strikingly revealed during the same period, is closely connected with the tendencies of the age. The underlying principle of Jansenism is indeed that of moral energy, the need of a constant effort to reach an ideal of renunciation and lofty virtue.

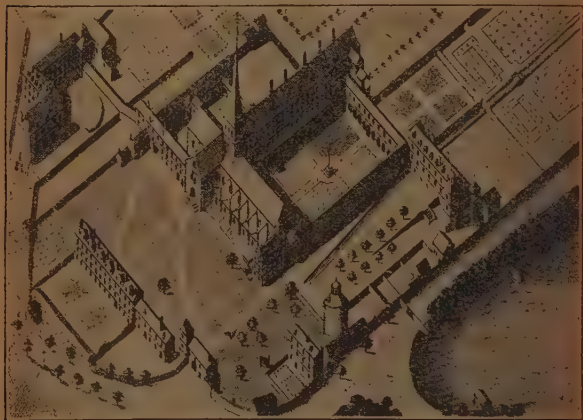
Jansenism is primarily a theological doctrine relating to Grace, or in other words to the part played by human liberty in the work of Salvation and the necessity for Divine assistance. It was introduced, towards 1633, into a Benedictine nunnery (1), by the Abbé de Saint-Cyran, to whom it had been imparted by the Flemish bishop Janssen (in Latin, Jansenius). Saint-Cyran, the nuns' spiritual guide and confessor, assembled at Port-Royal-des-Champs a number of pious laymen — notably the Arnaulds — who were resolved to live in the strictest observance of Christianity, and were designated in the 17th century by the name of the "Messieurs de Port-Royal". Jansenius had expounded his doctrine in a ponderous Latin book, *Augustinus*, published in 1640, after the death of its author. The book was examined, like all other theological writings, by the Docteurs de Sorbonne, who extracted from it five heretical propositions, which were submitted to the Court of Rome and condemned. The Jansenists declared that these were indeed damnable heresies, but that they were not to be found in Jansenius. This was what is termed a question of fact. Most likely it would not have assumed such great

(1) Port-Royal.

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importance, had not another and more serious question been raised at the same time.

The adversaries of the Jansenists in this quarrel were the Jesuits who, in their attempt to make religion pleasant and the reverse of harsh, were apt as confessors to exercise a sometimes excessive indulgence. They favoured the abuse of "casuistry", i. e. the study and discussion of "cases of conscience", instead



VIEW OF PORT-ROYAL DES CHAMPS (*in the fields*), the Jansenist monastery
(*Mr A. Gazier's collection*).

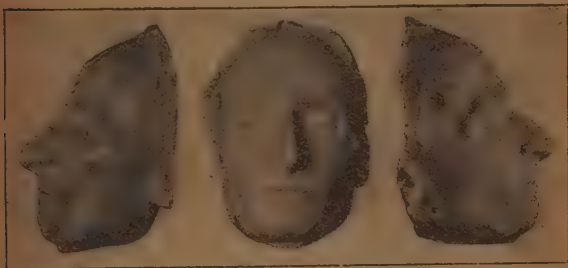
In the foreground, to the left, the entrance: in the centre, the cloisters, with a crucifix and the tombs: then the chapel. In the foreground to the right, the pond. All these buildings were destroyed in 1709, except the pigeon-house, in the centre of the foreground.

of showing themselves uncompromising in the condemnation of errors. The debate was thus broadened, in fact transformed. It was transferred from the sphere of theology to that of ethics, setting up as against the austere and strict religion of the Jansenists, the worldly and more accommodating practices of the Jesuits.

This was the interpretation put upon it by **Blaise Pascal** (1623-1662) in the famous series of the *Provinciales* (1656-1657), the name given to his eighteen *Lettres de Louis de Montalte*

(Pascal's pseudonym) à un provincial de ses amis et aux RR. PP. jésuites sur la morale et la politique de ces Pères. The first three of these letters deal with the theological aspect of the question, to which Pascal reverts in the last two of the series. The thirteen others deal more particularly with ethics.

Notwithstanding the high importance of the debate upon Grace, i. e. the respective limits of human liberty and the Divine



MOULD OF PASCAL'S FACE, taken after death (Mr A. Gazier's collection).

There exists no authentic portrait of Pascal in his advanced age.

Might, notwithstanding the universal bearing of the discussions relating to strict or relaxed morality, the *Provinciales* would long since have shared the fate of so many shortlived pamphlets of every description, had not Pascal approved himself therein a writer of genius. As Voltaire very judiciously declared : " The very best of Molière's comedies are not more full of wit than the first *Provinciales*, nor has Bossuet written anything more sublime than the last. " In the first letters, the question was to make the public take an interest in the controversy, to convince men and women of society that the condemnation of Jansenism had not been caused by any serious error, by anything subversive of religion. Pascal puts on the stage a number of characters — doctors, Jacobins, Jesuit Fathers — who really perform a comedy. But from the end of the ninth letter onwards his tone changes, he addresses the Jesuits themselves. Indignation takes the place of irony. He jests no longer, but chastises the casuists with the impassioned logic that belongs essentially to lofty eloquence.

After his death, Pascal's heirs found among his papers several

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• bundles of notes prepared by him in view of an apology of Christianity. These jottings, which were almost illegible, were pasted in books, after which Etienne Périer, his nephew, had two copies made of them by secretaries who were accustomed to Pascal's handwriting. A first edition of these fragments — the *Pensées* — was published in 1670, with a few modifications and attenuations of the actual MSS. In 1844, Prosper Faugère restored the original text, the purity of which subsequent editions have always striven to preserve.

Pascal's aim in this disquisition, which he had not time to work up, was to bring unbelievers to share his faith. Starting with a psychological analysis of man, he shed light upon the contradictions of human nature, a compound of greatness and baseness. That enigma, which philosophy is powerless to solve, Christianity explains — as Christianity alone can explain it — with the help of the two dogmas of the Fall and the Redemption. Pascal's Jansenist turn of mind would no doubt have asserted itself in the conclusion that, Redemption being a free gift of God, that gift is bestowed only upon a few. Thus all the discussions relating to Grace would have found their place in the practical conclusions of the *Apologie*.

But whereas it is easy to have a perception of Pascal's probable plan, which was known to his relatives and friends and was moreover sketched out by his nephew Etienne Périer in the preface of 1670, it is a harder task to assign a definite place to the fragments extant. These fragments however are admirable and reveal a wonderful genius, combining poetry and eloquence, the "geometrical spirit" and the "spirit of shrewdness", naturalness and passion. There is no French writer who smacks less of the author and in whom the man is more apparent. Each of his sentences gives us the impression of an idea, a sentiment, a passion, which is communicated to us direct. This natural and forcible mode of expression is obtained by Pascal through deep meditation, whereby he is enabled to probe matters to the quick. He is the truest and most sublime of the great geniuses of the 17th century.

5. The Reaction of the Bourgeois Spirit. — The Burlesque.

As a reaction against the pastoral style and preciosity, Charles Sorel (1599-1674) had written the *Histoire comique de Francion* (1622) — the characters of which are drawn from the most vulgar classes of society — and more especially the *Berger extravagant* (1628), which might aptly have been termed the French *Don Quixote*, had the writer been possessed of genius.

The same bourgeois spirit, at once malicious and realistic, inspired the *Letters of Guy Patin* (1602-1672). A professor

at the Collège de France, and dean of the Faculté de Médecine, this writer excels in telling us what thoughts a middle-class Parisian might be expected to entertain in relation to the Fronde, which to heroically minded people appeared a fine romance of adventure.

The burlesque is nothing else than the adaptation of preciosity to the bourgeois spirit. A few writers, such as **Théophile** and **Saint-Amand**, were equally successful in the precious and in the burlesque. Both these styles, opposed to each other as they might be considered, made their appearance at the same time. There was already a touch of the burlesque in the *Berger extravagant*. Saint-Amand's *Rome ridicule* was a further and thoroughly characteristic instance of the style. From 1648 to 1660 this class of production enjoyed an almost incredible vogue with **Cyrano de Bergerac**, **d'Assouci**, and more particularly with **Scarron** in his *Virgile travesti* (1648-1652), in which he transposes the epic style of the Latin poet into the language of the fish-market. His *Roman comique* (1651) is a very mixed production, in which there is much that is romantic or burlesque, but with a very marked realistic tendency in a few life-like and familiar pictures, in certain picturesque or comic scenes, drawn with great lightness of touch, and in some very cleverly shaded silhouettes.

In some respects the *Roman comique* constituted, from the bourgeois and realistic point of view, a step backwards as compared with *Francion*. **Furetière** renovated Sorel's tradition by eliminating every trace of the burlesque from his *Roman bourgeois* (1666). In this he portrays middle-class characters amid their usual surroundings and daily avocations. The legal circles especially are portrayed in the romance. We thus have a succession of scenes of middle-class life, with its outings, fêtes, gatherings and marriages, in short the familiar and realistic companion picture to the heroic entertainments of the *Grand Cyrus*. Furetière faithfully transcribes reality, but the composition of his romance is faulty. And his style is somewhat too inartistic.

All these productions point to a vastly different state of mind from that manifested in the bombastic, precious and gallant literature. The bourgeois spirit is here opposed to the heroic spirit, in that it substitutes observation for imagination, gives precedence to a taste for truth in the matter of adventures and character, is concerned with reality and middle-class preoccupations, and is distrustful of the sentiments and ideas that belong to fancy rather than to common-sense. These tendencies, amended and purified by contact with polite society, were soon to blossom forth into works of art with those perfect representatives of classical naturalism, Molière and Boileau.

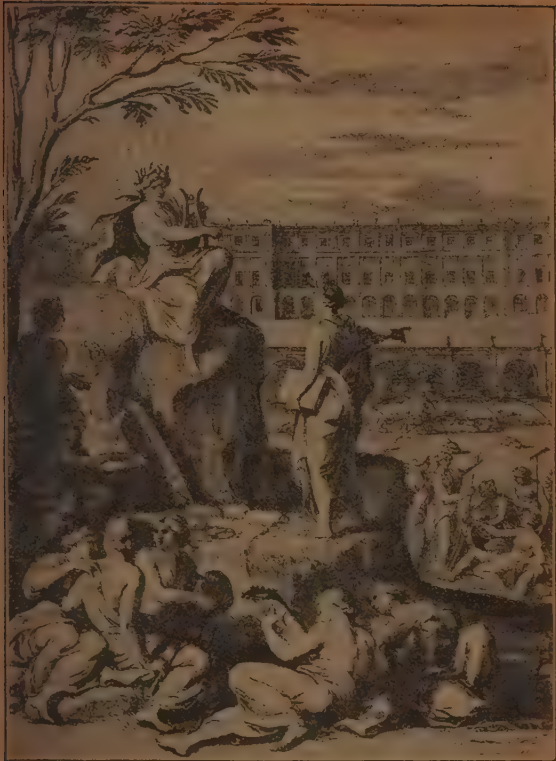
XI

SOCIETY AND PUBLIC LIFE IN LETTERS

A great French critic of the 19th century, Taine, observes : " Our whole classical literature is a wordly literature, born of society and intended for society. " Albeit too sweeping, this judgment contains a considerable proportion of truth. The Hôtel de Rambouillet, in the first place, a few salons after it, and more particularly the Court of Louis XIV contributed largely to the formation of that politeness and good taste, of that elegant simplicity of language, that are to be reckoned among the essential characteristics of French classical literature. It is but natural therefore that we should find a certain number of writers belonging to the fashionable circles : some of these, indeed, who wrote merely for themselves and for their intimate associates, are at times superior to many a professional author.

1. Cardinal de Retz's *Mémoires*.

Such is the case with Cardinal **de Retz**. His *Mémoires*, written between 1671 and 1675, and left unfinished, really belong, by reason of the character revealed in them, to the same periods as Corneille's tragedies and the heroic romance. During the troublous times of Louis the Fourteenth's minority, de Retz played a brilliant and adventurous part. He was mixed up in the war of the Fronde, whereby the Parliament and the great lords attempted to resume control over Royalty. Later on, when he had retired from politics, he wrote his *Mémoires*, dealing almost exclusively with that period of five years during which he had been most active and had planned a specially noble use for his activities. He is a companion spirit of Corneille's by his cult of the human will and by the interest he imparts to political affairs. He gets at the underlying reasons of the events, analyses the play of the characters and takes pleasure in the recital of heroic deeds. He is also fond of drawing portraits, sharing in this respect the marked proclivity of his age. But this great painter of souls and high deeds, this penetrating and pitiless psychologist, this writer full of life and colour, leaves far beneath him the somewhat diffuse and laboured application by dint of which Mlle de Scudéry attempted to portray the society of her time in the characters of the *Grand Cyrus*. The portraits, now sketched in with two or three pencil strokes in outline only as it were, now more developed and taken full face, are not the only part of his *Mémoires* in which de Retz approves himself a writer of genius. He has



APOLLO WITH THE MUSES BEFORE THE CHATEAU DE VERSAILLES

Drawing by Charles le Brun for a manuscript collection of the works of Charles Perrault (Library of the Château de Chantilly).

Le Brun's fine allegory symbolises the brilliancy of literature and art at the court of Louis XIV. It is at Versailles that Apollo and the Muses have made their chosen abode.

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the gift of story-telling, nor does any one surpass him in relating an anecdote with sprightly airiness. He excels likewise in the larger scenes, like the famous "journée des barricades" in the telling of which he has given us one of the most highly finished pictures in the French language. De Retz is the only writer of the age who has succeeded in showing us an animated, bustling crowd. There are many elements that go to make up the forcefulness of his style : first an impulsive energy which is temperamental in him ; the inborn ease of a great nobleman ; the expressions and images he borrows from the popular phraseology ; the turns acquired from reading the Ancients ; a vigour with examples of which his favourite author, Macchiavelli, may have supplied him. Taken all in all, de Retz's *Mémoires* are the 17th century masterpiece of their kind, nor do we find anything to equal them before Saint-Simon.

2. Mme de Sévigné's *Lettres*. — Mme de Maintenon.

In the same category as Memoirs, mention should be made of Letters, those private and every day memoirs, written for one's intimate friends. In the 17th century, favourable conditions gave birth to a number of letter-writers ; the progress of social life gave a remarkable impetus to the taste for writing ; society had acquired the habit of moral analysis ; Paris life generally and Court life in particular had a peculiar fascination for provincial folk, who wished to be kept informed of the minutest details ; they were of interest also for Parisians living in the country who wished to keep in touch with the Court and the city. Paris and Versailles, again, were interested in provincial news, and there were no newspapers to supply the testimony of eye-witnesses, a detailed account of current events and the news to be obtained in well informed circles. Nor had communications yet become sufficiently rapid and frequent to encourage improvised and hurried correspondence ; a letter took five days to reach Marseilles from Paris, and there were but two mails a week ; from Bretagne to Provence it took ten days and there was but one mail a week. The incoming mail was awaited with impatience, and there was plenty of time, before it went out, to get ready an interesting letter. Such letters indeed have been left by all our great writers (Racine, Boileau, Bossuet, etc.) ; by secondary writers (Saint-Evremont, Patru, Maucroix, etc.) ; by women, too (Mme de Sablé, Mme de La Fayette) ; and first and foremost by that most perfect and most prolific authoress, who will remain for ever the personification of the epistolary style in the French literature of the 17th century — Mme de Sévigné.

Birth and education alike shaped the destiny of **Marie de Rabutin Chantal, marquise de Sévigné** (1626-1696). She

was born in Paris and was the grand-daughter of Sainte Jeanne de Chantal, the friend of François de Sales, who retired from the world to found the Order of the Visitation at Annecy. Left an orphan when still a child, she was brought up by her uncle, the Abbé de Coulanges, who gave his most earnest attention to the education and tuition of his ward. He provided for her the very best teachers available, notably Chapelain who was held to be possessed of a highly critical mind, and Ménage, who taught her Latin, Spanish and Italian. In 1644, she married the Marquis de Sévigné, who was slain in a duel, in 1650, after which she devoted herself entirely to the education of her two children, a girl and a boy. In 1669, her daughter became the wife of the Comte de Grignan, and followed him to Provence, of which he was Governor.

For nearly thirty years, Mme de Sévigné kept her daughter informed of all the Court and City news. Her charming disposition, the passionate ardour of her maternal love, her mental sprightliness and brilliancy, make of these letters, written on the spur of the moment and completed by others addressed to relatives

and friends, a wonderful picture of contemporary society, a matchless chronicle of manners, politics and literature. We find in them comments on all the events of the age, precise details which serve to complement history, details supplied by a Court lady, placed at the very fount of information, who describes with untiring zest the manner of dressing, the deeds, the talk, of the age, all this interspersed with anecdotes that are a revelation in themselves. Through her we are made acquainted with Paris and provincial life as they were then; we learn what were the



MADAME DE SÉVIGNÉ

Reproduction of Mignard's picture, the property of the Comte de Luçay.

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subjects of conversation, how new books were received and what was to be seen at the theatre; how people travelled; how a marriage was negotiated, a piece of business transacted, and a lawsuit won or lost; how people behaved to their equals and to their inferiors; what a drawing-room was like, or a farm, a peasant, a gardener or a valet; a thousand other things besides,



CHATEAU DES ROCHERS, in Brittany.

This château belonged to Madame de Sevigné, and it was here that she wrote the greater part of her letters.

and not only how people lived, but how they died. What we discern, moreover, in all these tales, in all these pictures, in all this stirring *pourtraiture* of family and business life, of Court and city, of religion and war, is the strong and exquisite soul of a Christian lady of quality in the 17th century.

We thus obtain a much more intimate perception of that mighty age. The mere fact that the amiable Marquise wished to entertain her correspondents, that her letters were intended to show them what was going on while they were far away, that she desired, especially when addressing her daughter, to give free expression to her inmost sentiments and to lay bare her very

soul, serves to show that the 17th century was neither incapable of observing, nor of depicting, nor of feeling. It has frequently been contended, for instance, that the writers of this age lacked a true perception of nature. The truth of the matter is that they were too deeply engrossed by the moral side of mankind to be at great pains to express the merely picturesque. Mme de Sévigné excels

in depicting natural scenery and the seasons. It has been said that the 17th century, governed exclusively by reason, was deficient in imagination and sensitiveness :

Mme de Sévigné is gifted with imagination to an extraordinary degree ; we will even go so far as to say that all her other qualities are subordinate to that one. Nor is she incapable of yielding herself up to reverie under the spreading trees of her mysterious avenues, of harkening to the song of the nightingale in moonlit nights. In this respect, no doubt, she did not stand alone. But she was the only writer — with La Fontaine — to whom it was given to tell us so, and whom the conditions in which she wrote permitted to reveal the fact.

We see then the diversity of the subjects dealt with in Mme de Sévigné's letters, nay sometimes in one and the same epistle.



M^{me} DE MAINTENON AND HER NIECE M^{lle} D'AUBIGNÉ
The original is in the Versailles Museum.

In the background is seen the Foundation of Saint-Cyr.

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They are in the nature of a "causerie", full of variety and unforeseen effects, mostly improvisations. The predominant impression we receive from her style, though it is not entirely free from an unconscious précieuxness, due to previous intercourse with the Hôtel de Rambouillet, is its naturalness. Mme de Sévigné's solid education, her extensive reading, too, may have contributed to her becoming a writer; generally speaking, however, the qualities of her style are such as cannot be acquired: imagination, sensibility, natural wit, and above all an extraordinary gift of invention in the matter of expression, whereby she equals the boldest and most original writers.

By the side of this incomparable correspondence, mention must be made of Mme de Maintenon's. Of Protestant parentage and small means **Françoise d'Aubigné, marquise de Maintenon** (1635-1719), unlike the witty marquise de Sévigné, was brought up in an atmosphere of reserve and constraint, which left an enduring impression upon her naturally serious mind. Though she eventually reached the highest position, since after first marrying the poet Scarron, she became themorganatic spouse of the Grand Roi, she preserved to the end an underlying fund of sadness and ennui.

The good work to which Mme de Maintenon devoted herself entirely was the organisation of Saint-Cyr, a college for the daughters of impoverished noblemen (1). The letters she indited to the lady teachers of Saint-Cyr reveal her in the light of a first-rate educationalist, possessed of eminently firm reasoning powers and of the most judicious mind.

3. De La Rochefoucauld's *Maximes*.

François de La Rochefoucauld (1613-1689), after a spell of active, or rather of agitated life, in which love and ambition were for him a source of constant disappointments, entered a period of disenchanted meditation, in the course of which he wrote his *Mémoires* (1662), relating the events he was mixed up with, and his *Maximes* (1665-1678), in which he extracts the philosophy of those events.

The *Mémoires*, which raised a storm when they were published, do not aim at popularity, however, by indulging in spicy revelations, or by pointing the shafts of satire. A sense of proportion, a tone of haughty politeness and courtesy are the characteristic features of La Rochefoucauld's writings. They disclose a moralist more highly skilled than any other in penetrating the causes

(1) This educational establishment, built by Louis XIV and Mme de Maintenon, in the immediate vicinity of Versailles, became after 1802 a special school for the training of military officers.

of the events in which he has played a part and the hidden motives that guided the characters who had translated into action the philosophy of which he was about to set forth the theory.

Towards 1660, he frequented the circle of a lady of wit, Mme de Sablé, who had cut a certain figure among the *précieuses*, and had retired after 1652 to the vicinity of Port-Royal. Maxims were turned out at her house, as were letters generally at the Hôtel de Rambouillet, light verse at Mlle de Scudéry's, and portraits at Mme de Montpensier's. La Rochefoucauld took up this social amusement with the rest. An opinion was submitted in relation to some topic of every day ethics, and each guest discussed it in turns. Then they would all try their hands, between two meetings, at writing down their own feeling on the subject, endeavouring to embody it in a terse, piquant phrase. In this attempt they were all more or less successful, as witness several collections formed in this circle. La Rochefoucauld was more successful than the rest, and that is all.

What has been termed, with no little exaggeration, his "system" is, in point of fact, a mere generalisation of the theory that our so-called virtues are but the outcome of self-interested motives. To such as believe themselves to be virtuous La Rochefoucauld's advice is to search their own hearts, where they will discover as often as not petty and unworthy thoughts and purposes. Now that is the theme we find developed in all the collections of maxims coined in Mme de Sablé's salon. Nor should the fact be lost sight of that this salon was deeply impregnated with the Jansenist atmosphere. There is no "system" in La Rochefoucauld, there is no "philosophy", but merely a severe code of ethics that bids us to be sincere with ourselves, to examine scrupulously into the motives of our actions and to blush for our hidden vices: a code of moral-



FRANÇOIS DE LA ROCHEFOUCAULD

Reproduction of Petitot's enamel, the property of H. M. the Queen of Holland.

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ity that puts us on our guard against our latent hypocrisy. La Rochefoucauld himself was indeed no Jansenist, but we know that the Jansenists approved highly of his book and saw in it "a very forcible and ingenious satire of the corruption of nature by original sin."

The most personal elements in the *Maximes* are the definite turn La Rochefoucauld has contrived to impart to them, their concise form and exact terminology. La Rochefoucauld was a great writer born. His clean-cut, precise and lucid style is one of the most perfect models of classical French style.

4. Mme de La Fayette and her Romance *La Princesse de Clèves*.

The romance, in the second half of the century as in the first, in the case of Mme de La Fayette as in that of Mlle de Scudéry, is closely related to the group of writings that proceed exclusively from the society spirit, come into being in polite society, and are indited by society people for the benefit of their compeers.

Mme de La Fayette (1634-1693) received in her salon the elite of the aristocratic and intellectual society. She was the friend of La Rochefoucauld, who under her soothing influence more or less softened the misanthropy or at least moderated the severity of his *Maximes* (1). She knew and appreciated Mlle de Scudéry, whose romances she took pleasure in reading, while fully alive to their defects. She composed in the same style *Zayde*, a romance replete as yet with extravagant adventures and conventional sentiments, but several passages of which evince a real talent for analysis, free from insipidity and affected refinement. In 1677 she published *La Princesse de Clèves*, under the name of an elegant and fashionable poet, Segrais, upon whom it pleased her to father her writings before society. This little masterpiece is the earliest model in French literature of the psychological romance, and the only one that has survived of the many produced in the 17th century. It is a very short tale, in which is to be found the same simplicity of action, the same analysis of passion, and the same truth of expression as in a tragedy by Racine, just as we recognise in Corneille's tragedies the same taste for extraordinary adventures and lofty sentiments as in the heroic and affected romance of Mlle de Scudéry. But whereas in the first half of the century, tragedy had developed under the influence of the romance, the perfection it had reached and the high reputation it had acquired now imparted to tragedy a compelling influence that caused it to react in its turn upon the

(1) It is interesting to compare in this connection the edition of 1678 with that of 1665.

romance. *La Princesse de Clèves* is the story of a virtuous woman who loves another man than her husband and who turns to her husband for protection against that love. It cannot be denied that the exalted energy of the characters, the conception of virtuous love and the subordination of love to honour remind us of Corneille. None the less does the work bear in the highest degree the impress of the age. Its flowing, sedate and clear-cut style invariably maintains a measured reserve, a sort of refined dignity. The most violent passion is expressed in it without a cry being raised, in a tone that remains simple and even throughout : it is the perfection of the style of polite society.

XII

THE FOUR GREAT CLASSICAL MASTERS

The year 1660, when Louis XIV assumed the reins of government, was likewise the high water mark of poise and perfection reached by French classical literature. By that time the quelling of political unrest had set free the whole of the intellectual forces for social and literary activities. Furthermore, the union of ancient art and modern reasoning had been completed in the higher literary intellects, so that the three elements the conjunction of which was destined to realise classical perfection were for the first time harmoniously blended. Under the influence of Louis XIV and his Court, unity was achieved alike in literature and in politics. Coteries died out, objectionable influences were dispelled, ill-assorted elements were eliminated, the common tendency of writers was to aim at truth and naturalness. The main styles of production now reach perfection. Language has become the exact embodiment of thought. For half a century the history of literature is but a study of great minds and masterpieces.

1. Boileau.

It was precisely in 1660 that **Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux**, born in Paris in 1636 composed his first satire. The most interesting part of his satirical effort was to consist on the one hand in destroying the false reputations encumbering the drawing-rooms and the stage, and on the other in forcing upon public opinion a just appreciation of Molière and Racine.

As we have just seen, there were three obstacles still impeding the triumph of naturalness and truth : preciousness, bombast and burlesque. Each of these disfigurements of nature and reason was defended by critics whose judgment was held to be infallible, and represented by poets in favour among polite society, by

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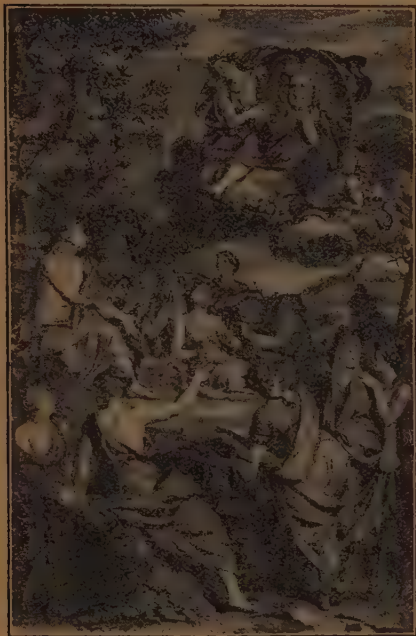
novelists and dramatic writers in the full enjoyment of success. These Boileau attacked uninterruptedly, while constantly defending the great classical authors against all cabals, whether professional or social, and teaching the public to hesitate no longer between Quinault and Racine, Boursault and Molière, Benserade

and La Fontaine.

He excelled in literary satire and in the epistle which with him is its natural sequel or complement.

The short hero-comic poem entitled *Le Lutrin* set the model of a light bantering style of composition opposed in its methods to the burlesque, the downfall of which was thus consummated.

While Scarron and his followers cultivated the burlesque by fathering trivialities and buffoonery upon mighty heroes, and by transposing epic deeds in a lower key, Boileau does precisely the reverse. To sing of a quarrel in a vestry he assumes an epic tone, adopting Homeric methods in the relation of vulgar or grotesque incidents.



THE PORTRAIT OF BOILEAU
CARRIED UP TO PARNASSUS BY SATIRICAL POETRY

After an engraving by Bernard Picart forming the frontispiece to the folio edition of the works of Boileau, (Amsterdam, 1718).

This topsy-turvy style of parody is laughable without being irreverent and to it the poet applies a consummate art, in which the form realises the idea with faithful accuracy and a perfect science of versification.

Boileau expounded his doctrine — or rather the doctrine practised by his great contemporaries — in his *Art poétique* (1674), which was published after the most conspicuous masterpieces of the 17th century, and is little more than a record of good usage as exhibited in his age by writers of genius. According to this doctrine, reason is, the very essence of the poetic faculty. Its object is to discover the truth, apart from which there can be no beauty. To express the truth should therefore be the aim and purpose of the writer, who should likewise subordinate the word to the idea and the rhyme to good sense.

Now there is but one way of getting at truth and that is to follow nature, as has been the practice of a few modern writers such as Racine and Molière and especially of the ancients, who in this respect are our masters. But if the imitation of nature is a condition of all art, it is not art itself. There can be no art without order and rule. The writer must therefore submit to the general and to the particular rules governing each individual "genre". These rules are by no means arbitrary: they are the outcome of reason and experience. Let us turn, therefore, to "that small number of marvellous writers whose very names are words to conjure with". The repeated suffrage of centuries, whereby they have been consecrated, is equivalent to the suffrage of universal reason.

This literary rationalism, which affords a striking conformity, though not a relation of cause and effect, with the Cartesian rationalism, was received in France with extraordinary favour, and marked the full efflorescence of the French genius, being in perfect agreement with its very nature. It looks upon beauty as being above all the effulgence of truth, in the exact measure in which that truth is possessed of verisimilitude or, in other words, is immediately perceived by our common reason. It prescribes the quest of beauty by means of the general, nay of the universal; but it would be a mistake to consider that the ideal it assigns to great writers is that they should depict abstract man. By imposing upon art the sovereignty of reason as its principle and the imitation of nature as its means, the classical doctrine eschews the extreme consequences of rationalism to which the 18th century was to fall a victim. Furthermore, by prescribing the study of the ancient masterpieces, it preserved in literature that notion of art whereof the 18th century lost sight almost entirely. For some thirty years, these three elements — reason, nature and antiquity — combined in the most complete harmony and gave birth to the most perfect productions.

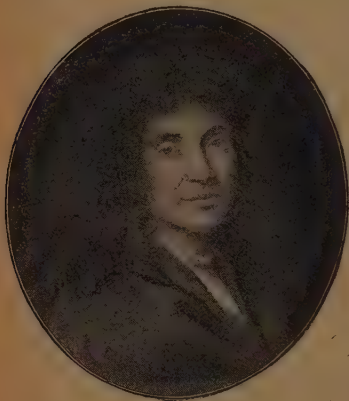
The ascendancy of Boileau covered the whole of this period.

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Since then, French literature in its inexhaustible fecundity has lit upon other forms of literary beauty. Romanticism succeeded to Classicism and itself gave place to Naturalism. We know that classicism is not the whole of French literature, any more than the latter is the whole of literature. We now see in Boileau's doctrine what it really is : the programme of a school second to none in our admiration. And that programme was expounded and defended by him with an accuracy of expression, a purity of diction, and a professional uprightness that make of him one of the best and most honourable of French writers.

2. Molière.

Jean-Baptiste Poquelin (1622-1673), who, in connection with the stage, named himself **Molière**, was the creator of French comedy. A Parisian by birth and the son of an upholsterer of the King's household, he received an excellent education at the Collège de Clermont and assumed the name of Molière when at the age of twenty-one together with his friends, the Béjarts, he founded the world-famed theatre that still bears his name (« La Maison de Molière »). The failure of this enterprise caused him to leave



PORTRAIT OF MOLIERE
by Mignard (Château de Chantilly).

Paris and tour the provinces. From 1642 to 1659, he served amid many hardships his double apprenticeship as an actor and an author. He had *L'Etourdi* performed at Lyons, in 1653; *Le Dépit Amoureux* at Béziers, in 1656; *Les Précieuses ridicules*, in Paris, 1659. This was the starting-point of his prosperity. Masterpiece followed upon masterpiece. In 1655, his company was honoured with the title of Troupe du Roi. But the prodigious activity he displayed as director, actor and author, gradually undermined his constitution. After suffering for a long time from an affection of the lungs for which he refused to be treated, he was seized with a fit of suffocation during a performance of *Le Malade imaginaire*. He managed however to play his part

to the end. Having been conveyed to his house he died an hour later.

Before Molière, comedy had not yet come into being in France. Whereas tragedy had been cultivated in the preceding period with signal success, the taste for the romantic that beset every avenue of literature had from 1636 to 1660 favoured the development of a fanciful and extravagant style of comedy, heroic by the complication of the intrigue and by the utterly chimerical exaggeration of the characters. In his *Visionnaires* (1637), Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin gives a delineation of preciosity that might be a rough sketch for the *Précieuses ridicules* and the *Femmes savantes*. From 1645 onwards, Scarron (1610-1660) wrote a dozen comedies, borrowed from Spain. The most famous of these is *Don Japhet d'Arménie* (1653), a huge piece of buffoonery. In *Le Pédant joué* (1654), by Cyrano de Bergerac, the Italian taste still asserts itself in the ludicrous and complicated incidents, the caricature and exaggeration of the capitani, swashbucklers, etc.

Corneille himself yielded in certain comedies — *L'Illusion comique* (1636), *Le Menteur* (1644) — to that taste for the romantic which prevailed between 1636 and 1660, and stood in the way of his effort to constitute a comedy that should be an exact presentment of life. Molière was to have the honour of founding the comic drama upon truth, by discarding the romantic intrigue dear to his precursors, and depicting the manners of his age and the characters of the Court and of the city.

The spirit of Molière is in the pure French and Gallic tradition. In reality it is the spirit of the old French farce, enlarged, enriched, raised to perfection, but ever strongly rooted in popular tradition. That is why his comedy is so thoroughly national in its nature.

What is of importance for Molière in his great comedies — *L'Ecole des Femmes* (1662), *Tartufe* (1664), *Don Juan* (1665), *Le Misanthrope* (1666), *George Dandin et l'Avare* (1668), *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* (1670), *Les Femmes savantes* (1672), *Le Malade imaginaire* (1673) — is neither the plot nor the dénouement: it is character. Everything concurs, in his plays, to enhance the presentment of some failing or ridiculous trait, studied by an observer of deep insight, chiefly concerned with affording us an exact and humorous image of reality.

His characters, by reason of the precision and energy of his delineation, are one and all originals belonging to his age, and of them he makes so many types, because he never loses sight of the human character of which they are a contemporary deformation. Yet even those which are thus true to human nature and equally appropriate to all ages, are never presented in an abstract form. Molière very justly perceived that in actual life characters can never be entirely dissociated from the manners of the time.

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His portraits are life-like because the general truth they embody is expressed in the particular form of contemporary failings. Molière's comedies afford us an extensive picture of France, astonishingly full of life and colour. There is nothing more artificial than the usual classification of Molière's plays under the several headings of farce, comedy of manners and comedy



SCENE FROM THE NOCE DE VILLAGE

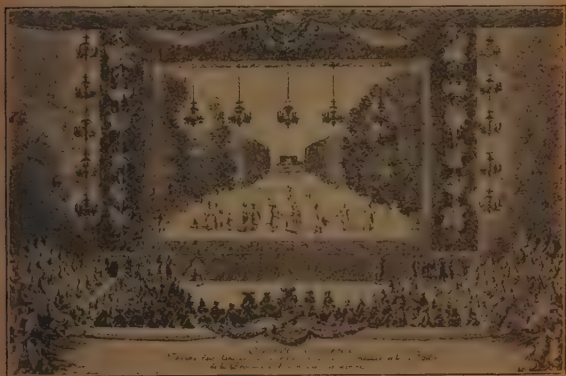
("Village Marriage", by Brécourt 1666). (After a print by J. Lepautre).

Right and left are seen aristocrats watching the scene from the stage itself.

of character. The incomparable wealth of his productions is due on the contrary to the fact that the three elements are blended in each. He ever proceeds in one and the same way : he borrows certain traits from certain individuals and generalises the results of his observation. He simplifies and enlarges.

His aim, as he stated in justification of his *Tartufe*, is to amend

the manners of his fellow men. He must therefore be possessed of a code of morality in the name of which he dispenses blame or approval. His morality is human and natural; in other words, based upon nature, upon instinct. Now nature is selfish, and instinct brutal. Nature must therefore be supplemented by reason, in order that it shall be restrained and kept within bounds.



SCENE FROM 'THE PRINCESSE D'ELIDE
After Israel Silvestre's engraving.

In the festivals organised by Louis XIV at Versailles, Molière had charge of the theatrical entertainments. For the series of "Pleasures of the Enchanted Island", which lasted seven days (May, 1664), he wrote "The Princess of Elide", which we see here played before the whole court, with great splendour.

The conception of good and evil is consequently nothing more than the conception of truth, and the failings, vices and passions depicted by comedy are errors of judgment obnoxious to reason and therefore to be laughed out of existence. The ridiculous is the comic poet's own domain.

Of all these errors of judgment, the most serious and the most prevalent are those relating to marriage and the education of girls. Married life demands a certain similitude of social standing, of temper, of age: but its essential requirement is love, the supreme "convenience" that creates or supplements all the rest.

In spite of the pronouncement of certain critics, among whom are to be reckoned La Bruyère and Fénelon, Molière is as good a

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writer of poetry as of prose. His versification is supple and quite as rich as can be desired. His style, with here and there a blemish due to hasty work, is nevertheless the model of the comic style, because Molière puts in to the mouth of each of his *dramatis personae* a distinctive mode of speech suitable to his condition and character.



JEAN RACINE

Sketch made by his son the owner of a copy of Horace (Bibl. Nat.)

gallantry than with deeds of heroism, and while powerless himself to depict true love, he at least pointed the way for Racine to follow in his attempt to renovate the dramatic art.

Jean Racine (1639-1699) was educated at Port-Royal, where he acquired a thorough knowledge of Greek. He started on his theatrical career with a play, *La Thébàïde*, bearing traces of the

3. Racine.

Discouraged by the failure of his *Pertharite*, in 1652, Corneille had kept aloof from the theatre, which he again attempted later on, but without obtaining any further success. **Quinault** hastened to take his place and was for ten years the master of tragedy. He began with *La Mort de Cyrus* in 1656, the very year when Thomas Corneille produced his *Timocrate*, which was performed simultaneously at two different theatres and was the greatest success of the century. An elegant and facile poet, Quinault was wonderfully successful later on in the operatic style. Meantime he supplied the requirements of a society more concerned with tales of love and

influence of Corneille. It was *Andromaque* (1667) that asserted his originality as a tragic poet and marked the advent of a new art. Whereas Corneille's dramatic system subordinated the characters to the action, the formula introduced by Racine inversely subordinates the action to the characters, restoring verisimilitude, simplicity and naturalness. Racine's tragedy is a reaction against the heroic and romantic style; it is essentially psychological, in that the interest lies chiefly in the analysis of passions. Of these there is none with which Racine was not conversant. He has known how to depict political ambition, both in man and in woman, religious enthusiasm, conjugal fidelity and maternal love. But the mainspring of his tragedies is love, the sentiment in which the will plays the



This print does not depict what is passing on the stage, but illustrates the tale told by Ulyses, one of the characters of the play.

FRONTISPIECE TO "IPHIGÉNIE"
In the 1687 edition of Racine's theatrical works.

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smallest part. If the secondary characters are ordinary lovers, using the language of contemporary gallantry, we are shown in his leading characters a love which jealousy renders tragical. *Andromaque* was a huge success. It was followed by a delightful comedy, *Les Plaideurs* (1668), and by four other tragedies, *Britannicus* (1669), *Bérénice* (1670), *Bajazet* (1672), *Mithridate* (1673), which met with the most favourable reception. After the momentary failure of *Phèdre* (1677), owing to the efforts of a cabal, Racine, through weariness and religious scruple, forsook the theatre and only returned to it after a silence of twelve years, to produce *Esther* and *Athalie*, the subjects of which are borrowed from Scripture.

An unexpected masterpiece thus marked the close of Racine's career. To his genius as a profane dramatist, fashioned by the study of the passions and of Antiquity, religion had superadded a sort of hallowed grandeur. The leading part devolves upon an invisible actor, God, whose Almighty Power dominates the play, just as fatality dominated the ancient drama. Lyrics, that integral part of Greek tragedy, resume their place in choruses proceeding from the very nature of the drama. The execution is worthy of the grandeur of the subject : *Athalie* is the masterpiece of French tragedy, and Voltaire declared it to be the " masterpiece of the human mind ".

Racine is not only a profound psychologist ; he is a great poet by reason of the melody of his style, the elegiac grace of certain scenes, the picturesque character of certain tableaux. The elegance and purity of the expression frequently hide from us its bold realism.

4. La Fontaine.

La Fontaine's Fables form a book that stands apart in French literature, which is not to say that La Fontaine himself was an exception in the group of the great classics of the 17th century : with more freedom and " gauloiserie ", he did but apply to a new style of composition, to which his name has remained attached, the same love of naturalness and truth, the same sense of proportion, and the same artistic perfection that Molière exhibited in comedy, Racine in tragedy, Boileau in satire or in the epistle.

Jean de La Fontaine (1621-1695) led the nonchalant life of a dreamer and an epicurean, housed, boarded and pensioned by rich patrons and friends. He first tried his hand at a variety of poems, tales, comedies and other poetical productions, until he published in 1668, when he was forty seven years of age, the first six books of his *Fables*, five others in 1678-1679, and the twelfth and last in 1694. The predominating trait of his genius is his universal sympathy. He depicted his own self in his novel,

The four great Classical Masters.

Psyché, under the name of Polyphile, the man who loves a great number of things. His admiration went out to writers of a widely different character : the ancients, Italy, the Middle Ages, the 16th century, and more particularly Rabelais and Marot. It was in hearing the recital of one of Malherbe's odes that he felt himself to be a poet. He took an interest in all the multifarious sights afforded by life and nature ; in man, like all the moralists of his age ; in the animal kingdom, unheeded by any but himself. And he found in the fable the frame that best suited him, or rather he transformed the fable according to his own genius. He made of it a tale, for he is a delightful story-teller ; a comedy, for he excels in observing and depicting the laughable side of the characters he draws so well, in ascribing to them all the language suitable to their condition. The setting of his fables is borrowed from nature, of which he is a discriminating lover ; to them he has confided his impressions as a fanciful dreamer, his reflections as a moralist, whose sole aim is to read us the lessons derived from experience, and whose whim it is to tell us, while speaking of animals, what he thinks of his fellow men.

This conception and treatment of the fable has made of it a miniature drama, with a plot and a dénouement, the actors of it being possessed of individual character. The manners of beast and man, of man in the 17th century and of man in all ages, are intermingled in a harmony that is the secret of the poet's art and which has made of his incomparable book " a spacious comedy with a hundred diverse acts, and having the whole world for its stage ".

La Fontaine's style is eminently adapted to such work ; sufficiently supple to lend itself to every requirement of the subject,



LA FONTAINE

Miniature preserved at the Louvre Museum.

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while conforming its manner to the widely differing tone of each fable, enriched with all the resources of the language, notably with the most expressive of the older words and with picturesque popular sayings. His versification exhibits the same freedom, the same suppleness, the same precision : the lines, of unequal length, are exactly modelled upon the idea, following its every contour and reproducing, so to speak, its very design. More than

any writer of his time, La Fontaine reached the perfection of naturalness.



THE FOX AND THE RAVEN

Illustration by Chauveau in the original edition of the « Fables » of La Fontaine (1668, First part, book 1, fable 2).

development of political eloquence, and where there is no political eloquence, legal eloquence does not rise to any great height, weighed down as it is apt to be by arid technical disputation and by a pedantic show of erudition. During this great period, French eloquence was exclusively of the religious order. Religion was for French society in the 17th century what public interest, a sense of civic duty, had been for the Greeks and Romans : the living fount of public oratory. The sermons of Bossuet and Bourdaloue are the real French equivalents of the speeches of Demosthenes and Cicero.

The restoration of the Roman Catholic faith, which in France followed upon the wars of religion, is marked in the pulpit by the gravity and solidity of the Christian word. Both with Du Perron and François de Sales, and after them, were to be found a great number of preachers whose sermons were based upon sound theology and inspired by faith and charity. These, however, had

XIII

BOSSUET AND THE PREACHERS — RELIGIOUS ELOQUENCE.

The form of government existing in France in the 17th century, — an absolute monarchy without a representative assembly — forbade the devel-

not yet succeeded in freeing religious eloquence from the trammels of profane erudition and a worldly spirit, nor in building it up in all its dignity and purity. Various favourable influences were brought to bear upon the art of preaching during the second third of the 17th century : Port-Royal imbued religious feeling with new ardour and conspicuous gravity ; the Fathers of the Oratory developed theological learning and the exact analysis of the passions ; the Jesuit Fathers turned their attention to the literary ornament of form, while **Saint Vincent de Paul** — *Monsieur Vincent*, as he was then styled — directed Christian oratory towards simplicity and practical usefulness.

Jacques Bénigne Bossuet (1627-1704) was educated at Dijon, his native town, and in Paris at the Collège de Navarre, where he studied philosophy and theology. He was granted his degree of Doctor of Divinity in 1648, after undergoing a brilliant examination, in which the great Condé himself was tempted to participate, and lived for seven years at Metz in the capacity of archdeacon. Here he fitted himself by meditation [and] study for the



BOSSUET

After the portrait painted by H. Rigaud,
(Museo degli uffizii, Florence.) Photo Alinari.

duties of a preacher and controversialist. He came to Paris in 1659 and began to preach before the Court in 1662. Ordained a bishop in 1669, he became in 1670 the tutor of the Grand Dauphin, devoting himself to this task for ten years. In 1681 he was made bishop of Meaux and thereafter administered his diocese and set himself up as the jealous defender of Roman Catholic orthodoxy and of the liberties of the Gallican Church.

The greatness of Bossuet, like that of Pascal, is due to the fact that he never had the slightest hankering after literary glory. As a preacher, his one concern is to adapt his arguments to those he is addressing, and he reverts to former sermons of his own in

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order to utilise them under a new form. Not only did he abstain from publishing his discourses, but the manuscripts left by him had been altered and amended so frequently that not one of them was in a fit state to be printed. As a tutor, he makes a special and thorough study of all he teaches, and composes several works for the benefit of the Dauphin. As a controversialist, he ever holds the breach, ready to beat off all those whom he considers to be the enemies of Faith. But whatever the shape assumed by his activity, he never speaks nor writes but to move and to convince — to convince all and sundry of the truth of his beliefs. Bossuet is indeed before and above all a sacred orator.

That is why his *Sermons*, long unappreciated, appear to us to-day as the most complete expression of his genius. If the contemporaries of Bossuet set greater store by orators who were vastly inferior to him, it was because he did not go out of his way to please his hearers. He had nothing in common with your worldly moralist, who seeks to grace his discourse with profane ornaments. Bossuet always grounds his ethics upon dogma and treats dogma as an end in itself. His argumentation marshals in a powerful array all the elements that are the groundwork of faith : Revelation, the Fathers of the Church and tradition. A sermon thus constituted is austere in substance, and if to this be added that it is partly improvised in the matter of form, it will clearly fail to delight an over refined audience, " more eager for pleasure than for salvation ". Posterity however has done justice to Bossuet's sermons, in which a groundwork of ample and profound truth is presented under a concrete, highly coloured and li-felike form, with striking and clear-cut images, a whole range of picturesque and dramatic poetry, a lyricism fed by a constant study of Holy Writ, and which frequently soars to the height of both psychological and mystical meditation, being then closely akin to modern lyricism.

It is in his works of edification, the *Méditations sur l'Evangile* and the *Elévations sur les Mystères*, that Bossuet, giving free rein to his heart and to his imagination, stands forth as the great lyrical poet of the 17th century.

The funeral oration is for Bossuet nothing but a sermon based upon a conspicuous example. This style of discourse, which is by its very nature both solemn and pompous, he turns into a lesson in history, religion or ethics. Furthermore, by an admixture of private details and personal reminiscences, he imparts to it an entirely new accent of sincerity. The funeral orations relating to Henrietta of England, Duchess of Orleans (1670) and to Condé (1687) are masterpieces of unrivalled loftiness and classical perfection.

All the rest of Bossuet's works, whether written as tutor to the Dauphin or as bishop, have their origin in his predication. It was while preparing his sermons that he built up the doctrine



FUNERAL RITES OF HENRIETTA OF ENGLAND *

In the Basilica of St-Denis, August 21, 1670. After J. Lepautre's print.

It was in this magnificent setting, in which the last honours were paid to the sister-in-law of Louis XIV, that Bossuet pronounced the second of his six great "oraisons funèbres" which form the most classical part of his works.

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whereof he subsequently composed his many treatises. There are sermons of his that contain in an abridged form the *Histoire Universelle*; others, the *Variations*: others again the *Politique*.

The *Discours sur l'Histoire Universelle* (1681) is above all an apology of the Christian religion, as proof of which he adduces the perpetuity of the Church. But in the chapters dealing with empires, Bossuet adopts the human point of view, shows great penetration and creates the philosophy of history. His *Histoire des variations des Eglises protestantes* (1688) is held by many to be the masterpiece of Bossuet, by reason of the force of erudition and critical acumen displayed by the author in the collection and examination of the texts, the lucidity of the exposition and the art with which he draws the portraits of the doctors of the Reformed Church. His aim moreover was a very lofty one in that his chief object was to bring back the Reformers and to restore the unity of the Christian Church. This was his generous and long-cherished dream, the subject of his correspondence with Leibnitz.

Bossuet is perhaps the greatest of all French writers. His marvellously varied style, expressive of his whole personality, is invariably suited to the subject: spirited in his sermons, sublime in his funeral orations, perspicuous and simple in his controversial writings. A figure quite apart in classical literature, he owes his originality to the fact that in him are harmoniously blended the traditions both of Greco-Roman antiquity and of the Bible. He is the richest, the freest, the most concrete of all the writers of the 17th century, and though he uses prose as a vehicle for his thoughts, he is a great poet.

After Bossuet, mention should be made among sacred orators of Bourdaloue, whom the 17th century set above Bossuet. The Court sent for him on ten different occasions to deliver the Lent and Advent Sermons. His discourses, learnedly divided and subdivided; his serious, well reasoned and deductive eloquence; the faithful portraits of which his audience recognised, or thought they recognised, the originals, one and all delighted his contemporaries. We are somewhat surprised that the latter listened with so much enthusiasm to a preacher whose sustained elegance of speech appears to us to day rather monotonous. But it may be that the addresses they heard were more blunt, more familiar and less colourless than the versions of Bourdaloue we are given to read to-day. Recent research work has brought to light the fact that the first editor of his sermons, Father Bretonneau, had revised and expurgated Bourdaloue's text in obedience to scruples of taste that enfeeble the original.



LOUIS XIV AND COLBERT VISITING THE NATURAL HISTORY ROOM AND THE
ACADEMY OF THE SCIENCES

After an engraving by S. Leclerc.

This engraving formed the frontispiece to the different Memoirs published by the members of the Academy of the Sciences (1671) as a symbol of the protection accorded to scientific research by Louis XIV. The progress realised as a consequence of this impulse contributed to the birth of the quarrel of Ancients and Moderns.

XIV

THE END OF THE 17th CENTURY

The perfection of the great French classics — Molière, Racine, La Fontaine, Bossuet — is the product of an equilibrium between all the forces of society and all the faculties of the mind. Christianity held sway over the souls, as did the monarchy over the nation, the salons over the manners. Tradition and authority moderated reason, which combined with imagination and good taste in the creation of works of art. Already during the last twenty - five years of the 17th century, signs were not wanting that this equilibrium was about to be upset. Though to the last the great writers of the preceding generation retain their vigour and their rude health, so to speak, we feel nevertheless, or we anticipate, the dissociation of the elements which the genius of the great classics had so harmoniously joined together. The different styles are worked out, preciosity comes to life once more, coteries are again to the fore. A rationalistic tendency asserts itself in the Quarrel of Ancients and Moderns. La Bruyère, with his picturesque realism and the care he bestows upon artistic expression ; Fénelon, with his sensitiveness and individuality pervading his every line ; the reforming spirit of the latter, and the keen sense of social evil to be found in the former, prognosticate the new tendencies of society and literature.

1. The Quarrel of Ancients and Moderns.

Admiration for the Ancients was shared in the 17th century by all the writers whom we now consider to be their equals, or even their superiors. It brought about a reaction. In 1678, Charles Perrault, in a poem read before the Académie française, extolled the age of Louis XIV, equalling it to the ages of Pericles and Augustus. Boileau demurred, and thus was revived the famous quarrel started in an acute form some years earlier, when Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin, in the prefaces to his epic poems, contended (1669-1674) that the modern epic should assign to the wonders of Christianity the place given to pagan myths in the ancient epics, and, speaking generally, assert its independence and shake itself free from the Ancients both in the choice of the subject and in the manner of its treatment. But this second-rate rhymster was merely concerned with justifying his choice of a modern and Christian hero in his poem *Clovis* (1657). It was but incidentally and so to speak involuntarily that he showed a tendency to generalise the question and bring all Antiquity to a trial, Charles

Perrault on the contrary expounds the thesis in his poem and undertakes to vindicate his position thoroughly in his *Parallèles des Anciens et des Modernes* (1688-1697).

Fontenelle had indeed forestalled this publication by issuing his *Digression sur les Anciens et les Modernes* (January 1688), in which he hinted with the utmost caution at the conclusion that if in point of fact the ancient poets have not been surpassed, they may be so any day, nature being ever the same, nay they must be, since every age bequeathes its discoveries to those that come after. Boileau countered this contention by publishing his *Réflexions sur Longin* (1694), in which is to be felt some embarrassment, for he was in a rather awkward position, being a thorough modern himself and finding it no easy matter to maintain the inferiority of the moderns, after Pascal and Corneille, Racine and Bossuet, La Fontaine and Molière. The two adversaries made up their difference and Boileau conceded the point that the 17th century was equal to any century of Antiquity.

This indeed was not the question at issue in a controversy, the full significance and scope of which we are now in a position to grasp. The starting-point of the debate was whether the idea of progress is applicable to literature and art. This idea, fatal to art, was bound to appeal to a polished, intellectual society, putting its whole trust in reason, to which it believed it had given full expression. The result was the decline of literature, or rather its renovation by philosophy and science, its transformation into an actual weapon, an instrument of proselytism — as we shall see when dealing with the 18th century. In that part of the 17th century that witnessed the Quarrel of Ancients and Moderns, this point had not yet been reached. Two great writers, La Bruyère and Fénelon, may be placed next to the masters of the preceding generation, in spite of the fact that by certain signs they point to the advent of new times.

2. La Bruyère.

Jean de La Bruyère (1645-1696) lived in the house of the Condés, in the capacity of instructor in history to the young Duke, the Prince's son. He observed the world with a penetrating, albeit somewhat misanthropic eye. He translated the *Characters* of the Greek philosopher Theophrastus, supplementing them with a few chapters on the characters of his own age, which he thus presented modestly under cover of the ancient moralist, just as La Fontaine had presented his *Fables* under cover of Aesop. In successive editions, he added to the original part of his book, *Les Caractères ou les mœurs de ce siècle* (1688). It were vain to look for a natural sequence in these sixteen chapters, La Bruyère's aim is to please by the variety and unexpected nature of his

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remarks. He has no cut-and-dried system, like La Rochefoucauld. His philosophy, both social and Christian, originates in mutual respect for our several rights and requirements, in a charitable spirit, urging us to sacrifice our own self-interest for the good of our neighbour, of our sense of duty to the State, inciting us to the scrupulous observance of its laws.



JEAN DE LA BRUYÈRE

After the portrait attributed to Tournière (Attributed by Monsieur Ch. Oulmont).

The new and interesting part of his book is that in which he describes the manners of his age and portrays the original types of society. He is an innovator as regards the refinements and novelties of his style by the attention he pays to concrete detail, and he enhances the veriest truisms by clothing them in a form that is always elaborate, uncommon and brilliant.

This perfection of form would even appear to have been of greater importance in his eyes than the substance itself, for the reason that art consists in making it one's own by the way in which it is expressed. La Bruyère has stated that "it is just as much a craft to write a book as to make a clock". And of that craft

he possessed every secret, except perhaps the greatest of all, that of giving a book the essential unity that makes of it an organised entity. His own book is a repertory of all the forms of the art of writing. Nor is La Bruyère wanting in wit, within the meaning assigned to the word by the French 18th century, notably by Voltaire when he wrote, after giving a number of very pleasing definitions of wit in its every shape and form: "In short, I would fain mention to you all the different ways of showing wit, did I but have more of it myself." But it is not in this respect only that La Bruyère foreshadows the 18th century. Nor is it only by his style, by the short crisp sentences that break up the lengthy periods of the preceding age: it is rather by his aggressive irony, by

his perception of the necessity for social reform, which are displayed here and there throughout his book, notably in the chapter entitled *De quelques usages*. On the other hand, La Bruyère remains bound in some ways to the tradition of the 17th century, which is diametrically opposed to the following century: he sides with Boileau as against Perrault in the Quarrel of Ancients and Moderns; he is a determined adversary of the libertines, that is to say of such as nakedly profess unbelief or practise it more discreetly. He is a transitional writer.

3. Fénelon.

François de Salignac de la Mothe-Fénelon (1651-1715) was an aristocrat both by birth and by temperament. He always possessed the manners and sentiments of a very great nobleman. Having at an early age entered the seminary of Saint-Sulpice, his first intention was to devote himself to missionary work in the Levant. But his poor health compelled him to forego this design, and in 1678 he was appointed Superior of the "Nouvelles Catholiques", an institution for the catechising of young Protestant girls, converts to Roman Catholicism. These duties he discharged in the most tactful manner for a period of ten years, and it was during this time that he composed his earliest work, the *Traité de l'éducation des filles* (1689), a compendium of excellent advice with a very solid psychological groundwork. Fénelon is well versed in the natural disposition of the young: he would have us be content with following and assisting their development. He looks in the first place to religion for the formation of a girl's character, after which he is ready to avail himself of every form of useful knowledge, including even the elements of common law, so that when the girl has developed into a woman she may be able to manage her own business. All these studies must however be adjusted to the nature of the female mind and regulated in conformity with a practical conception of the part played by woman in the family. It is to be noted that this moderate, sensible book is in several points ahead of our modern educational methods.

The very year when he published this treatise, Fénelon was called in to be tutor to the Duc de Bourgogne, grand-son of Louis XIV. The education he gave him is as widely known as that given to the Grand Dauphin by Bossuet. The lad was supposed to be utterly intractable. Fénelon set himself to chasten and subdue his unruly disposition. In this he was but too successful, and later on he was obliged to do his best to resto. to the future successor of Louis XIV some part of that energy whereof he had been instrumental in depriving him. For the benefit of his pupil he composed three of his works: the *Fables*, the *Dialogues des morts*, and *Télémaque*. The last of these is by

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far the most important. It is also the most celebrated; its reputation spread throughout Europe, and there is no nation into whose tongue it has not been translated.

Under the outward appearance of a novel in prose, which is almost a poem, *Télémaque* is only a further treatise on education, but one intended for a prince and presented in a romantic setting

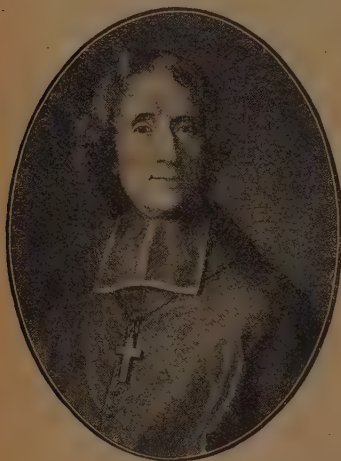
reminiscent of the heroic age of Greece. It was Fénelon's purpose to make his pupil acquainted with the Greek poetry, while instructing him in the duties of a king.

Contemporary opinion saw in this work a satire aimed at Louis XIV and his government. It strikes us to-day as a somewhat frigid allegory, yet one the attentive perusal of which is most instructive, in an edition that quotes authorities.

In 1695, Fénelon obtained the archbishopric of Cambrai and soon found himself involved in the quarrel relating to "Quietism". A woman of exstastic devotion, Mme Guyon, upheld this mystical doctrine, according to which Christian perfection resides in passive and uninterrupted contemplation of the Deity.

Bossuet, the watchful guardian of orthodoxy, opposed that doctrine and induced the See of Rome to condemn Fénelon's *Explication des Maximes des Saints* (1699), as lapsing into heresy. From that time onwards Fénelon was in disfavour, and lived an exile in his archbishopric.

The *Traite de l'existence de Dieu*, the first part of which was published in 1712, contains a brilliant development of the argument based upon final causes, and of the proof afforded by the contemplation of the universe and by the study of its laws. The



FÉNELON

Portrait painted by J. Vivien, engraved by B. Adran.

literary interest of this treatise resides in the fact that the author introduces nature and her perceptible beauties into a style of literature too exclusively human and intellectual.

Both as chaplain of the *Nouvelles Catholiques* and as archbishop, Fénelon preached a great number of sermons. Of these, however, but two have come down to us, having been delivered on semi-official occasions : the one before the Siamese ambassadors, and dealing with the progress of the Christian faith in the East (Sermon pour la fête de l'Épiphanie, 1685), the other at the consecration of the archbishop of Cologne (1707). The rest of his discourses, or sermons proper, have not been preserved, for Fénelon was in the habit of speaking extempore. He has expounded his views on the art of preaching in his three *Dialogues sur l'éloquence en général et sur celle de la chaire en particulier* and in his *Lettre à l'Académie française*. His ideal is a plain exposition of Scripture, with a view to furthering moral rectitude — a homily, free from any excess of pedantry in the quotation of texts or of scholasticism in the distribution. And that was the way he himself preached.

Fénelon's talent is, like his character, one of great complexity. He was a man of an irresistibly seductive charm and nobility, an affectionate yet masterful disposition, very ambitious withal, notably to rule his country by ruling the king. His mind was highly fanciful, and made up of all manner of contrasts, not to say contradictions. By his Christianity and love of ancient learning Fénelon was eminently a man of his time ; by his feudal conception of government he goes back to the Middle Ages, while his love of peace, of sound administration, of the " lights " accruing from social and philanthropic sentiment assign him to the 18th century. The 18th century indeed adopted him, set him down as a " philosopher ", and wove a legend round his name, which long concealed his real character. He was part nobleman, part scholar, part churchman. His style is as hard to define as his person, blending as it does the fragrance of ancient reminiscences with the ease of conversation. There is no writer whose diction is more simple or that requires less effort on the part of his readers. But the phrase lacks the solidity, the noble construction of the great epoch. Both in the form and in the substance there is a something that already foreshadows a new era.

4. The *Mémoires* of Saint-Simon.

Saint-Simon (1671-1755) composed his *Mémoires* at a much later date, probably not before 1740. He belongs, however, to the same period by the subject matter of his work, which deals with the last thirty years of the reign of Louis XIV and with the Regency ; by his political ideas, which bring him into com-

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munion with Fénelon ; and lastly by the form of his writings which, remote as it is from the consummate art of La Bruyère, exhibits the same taste for concrete detail and picturesque realism. For fifty years Louis de Rouvray, duc de Saint-Simon, a vain-glorious nobleman, enamoured of his title of duke and peer of the realm, yet invariably discontented, had taken down notes

regarding men and matters, as well as the whole "machinery" of the Court. He had been a persistent questioner, a complacent listener, and had stored up pell-mell every item of evidence and tittle-tattle to be gathered from lords and ladies, men-servants and maid-servants. He was passionate and narrow-minded, often swayed by violent hatreds, and has consequently very little weight as an historian; impartial judgments must not be expected from him. But he has painted the Court with a wonderful relief, whether in his portraits, in his larger scenes, or in his narratives. He breathes life into all the objects he describes. A keen observer and an excellent psychologist, he unites in his portraits the details



SAINT-SIMON

Reproduction of the original painting in the possession of his descendants.

of the moral disposition with the features of the outward man. His style, which is frequently embarrassed and even faulty, encumbered with terms forged by himself or picked up around him, is characteristic of his artist's mind, of his picturesque fancy and high-strung sensibility. Saint-Simon, who does not write well, and does not trouble to write well, is nevertheless a great writer, a writer of genius, the most modern artist of French literature before the Revolution.

XV

THE 18th CENTURY : THE PRECURSORS — THE FIRST SALONS

1. General Characteristics.

In the history of French literature the 18th century continues the 17th century by opposing it.

Having received from the preceding age the principle of the sovereignty of reason, it draws the full consequences of that principle. It does away with the limitations, the restraints imposed by the 17th century upon the authority of reason: it sets up reason as the universal judge of all theory, the regulating principle of all practice. It thus exhibits first a reforming, then a revolutionary spirit. Similarly it inherits the classical tradition which, however, is weakened, together with all other traditions — with Roman Catholicism and the monarchy.

When in quest of literary models, the writers of this age do not go back beyond the 17th century; they copy its masterpieces, they adopt its methods, they slavishly obey its rules. Hence a first characteristic of the literature of the 18th century: the decadence of all forms of art and the feebleness of purely literary works.

But whereas mediocrity is the very stamp of the 18th century whenever it restricts itself to copying the 17th, it becomes interesting in its turn when it beats out a path of its own. Its conception of literature is very different from that formed by the 17th century: the aim assigned by it to letters is no longer the study of the human heart in its general aspects, but the study of the mutable institutions of society. It is a century of "philosophers", of "enlightenment": literature ceases to be an art and becomes philosophical, scientific and militant; it is no longer an end in itself, but is made an instrument of propaganda for philosophical theories.

Yet this conception does not prevail suddenly or from the start. Nor does it ultimately prevail without bringing about a reaction.

Hence the three sharply defined periods into which the 18th century is divided.

In the first of these (1715-1750) it already exhibits its two essential characteristics. On the one hand, literature proper is in a state of decay: the exhausted classical styles give birth to indifferent productions only; the sense of composition is lost, the form is impoverished and becomes complicated. Philosophy and science, on the other hand, ushered into literature by Montes-

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quieu and Buffon, effect its renovation. Concurrently sentiment broadens out its domain with a theoretician such as the moralist Vauvenargues; sensibility reigns supreme on the stage with the tearful comedy—"Comédie larmoyante"—of La Chaussée, in the novel with the Abbé Prévost and Marivaux. The latter originates a new form of the dramatic art, in which blossom forth all the grace, all the fancifulness and all the wit of high society in the 18th century.

That society never ceased to interchange with literature an influence of which it was alternately the source and the object. Each period had its salons. From 1715 to 1750 the chief of these were presided over by the duchesse du Maine, the marquise de Lambert and Mme de Tencin.

But if the new spirit was constituted during this first period, it did not yet achieve the work which was destined to be the work of the whole century. It was in the second period (1750-1775) that literature, having become a weapon of offence and an instrument of propaganda, brought forth the works by the influence of which the old political, social and religious order was eventually destroyed. Voltaire, with his sixty years of uninterrupted production, was the connecting link between the two periods, the latter of which was marked by the *Encyclopédie*, the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and the plays of Beaumarchais.

All this brings us down to about the year 1775, or in other words to the third period. By this time the oratorical faculties had awakened with Rousseau, leading the way for the poetic faculties. Contrary to what had taken place at the beginning of the 17th century, when lyricism was transformed into eloquence with Malherbe, in this case the eloquence of Rousseau led up to lyricism. Sentiment and imagination reappear in our literature; sensation itself creeps in; Bernardin de Saint-Pierre foreshadows the advent of a new art, while at the same time Chénier marks a reversion to the art of antiquity. Thereupon the Revolution breaks out, and by virtue of the political events, under the influence of the general commotion, a new turn of mind presently asserts itself.

2. The Precursors : Fontenelle and Bayle.

It is no easy matter to state exactly when the 18th century began to assume its philosophical and literary character. On the one hand, certain writers of the age of Louis XIV, such as Boileau, were still alive in 1711, and that king himself did not die before 1715; again Fontenelle, though already forty-three years old in 1701, belongs more properly to the 18th century, as well as Bayle, whose *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697) was as it were a first instalment of the *Encyclopédie*. As a matter of fact,

literary periods are such as correspond to well defined currents of thought.

Neither by the dates of his life and death, nor by those at which his works were published, can **Bayle** (1647-1706) be said to belong to the 18th century. But he was the originator of its methods. The boldest innovators of the age borrowed from him some of their ideas and arguments. As to Voltaire, the whole of his philosophical learning was derived from that source.

Pierre Bayle was the son of a minister of the Reformed religion. A convert at one time to Roman Catholicism, he changed back to the Protestant faith, and in 1681 he settled in Holland, where he was appointed to a chair of philosophy at Rotterdam.

In his *Pensées diverses sur les comètes* (1682), he dealt with all manner of metaphysical and ethical questions, with the unavowed purpose of attacking theism. The *Nouvelles de la république des lettres* (1684), in which he analysed the books of the day and brought out their central idea, constitute the earliest Review.

Dismissed in 1693 at the request of the Protestant Minister, Jurieu, he devoted himself entirely to the work of compiling his *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1696-1702), which consists of a mass of observations concerning the mistakes and omissions in the dictionary published some little time before by Moréri. The text of the articles is very short as compared with the countless footnotes, crammed full of French, Latin and Greek quotations, appended with reference numbers. Thanks to this ingenious device, the author relegated the most serious discussions to obscure corners. His remarks are aimed in a general way against Roman Catholicism and the religious spirit.



BAYLE AT THE AGE OF TWENTY-EIGHT

After a. print by Cheveau.

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Bayle calls the established traditions and beliefs in question once more and takes up the cudgels against authority. His caustic and enquiring turn of mind is rooted in scepticism or leads up to it. Bayle's dictionary was the all-essential book and as it were the Bible of the 18th century.

Fontenelle (1657-1757) was Corneille's nephew on his mother's side. His literary career had begun, in the preceding century,

by a tragedy, *Aspar* (1680), which Racine avers to have been the earliest occasion on which an audience expressed disapproval by blowing whistles. His *Dialogues des Morts* (1683), and more particularly his *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* (1686), in which he applies to the expounding of scientific ideas the style of high society with all its affected airs and graces, had brought him fame. He had become a member of the Académie française in 1691, and life secretary of the Académie des sciences in 1699. In this capacity he wrote his outstanding works: the *Mémoires* of the Académie and the *Eloges* of deceased Academicians. Fontenelle shows remarkable lucidity



FONTENELLE IN HIS OLD AGE

After a portrait by Vorio, engraved by
A.-L. de Laive.

in studying the most delicate problems of philosophy and science: he discerns their relations to one another and draws the consequences resulting therefrom, by which means he acts upon his age.

His most significant work is his *Histoire des oracles* (1687), the origin of which was a treatise written in Latin by a learned Dutch scholar. In this, his apparent purpose is to establish the harmless thesis that the oracles of the Ancients were not rendered by evil spirits. In reality, he analyses the causes of credulity, with a view to demonstrating that it encourages deceit. Oracles

were discarded only when the human understanding became enlightened. The idea that is to be gathered from the book, or at least the impression left upon the mind, is that we should be mistrustful of the marvellous, and that in point of fact the marvellous vanishes into thin air when examined in the light of sober reality. When all is told, this seemingly harmless criticism of the faith of the Ancients in their oracles was the first assault of the scientific spirit upon the very foundations of Christianity.

Fontenelle was one of the originators of that scientific and wholly intellectual literature from which art is banished, one of the creators of that purely rational language subsequently used in the exposition and discussion of doctrines. Following in his footsteps, the 18th century set about its general work of vulgarisation.

3. The Salons.

During the second half of the 17th century, the salons had been eclipsed by the Court. The dullness of Versailles, however, at the end of the great reign favoured their revival, and restored their influence to the full, together with their brilliancy. The first in point of time was the frivolous court of Sceaux, whose sole pursuit, under the guidance of the Duchesse du Maine, granddaughter of the great Condé, was the enjoyment of allegorical plays, torchlight processions in the park, musical interludes and dances. These festivities were exceptionally gorgeous about the year 1720, though by that time the taste for amusement was beginning to yield to more serious thoughts. There was, indeed, as we shall see in the case of Montesquieu, a sort of revival of preciosity, combined with a taste for wit and scientific pursuits. The Marquise de Lambert attempted to renew the endeavour made by the Marquise de Rambouillet to restrain the prevailing licentiousness of manners, to restore morality and politeness. She opened her salon in 1690 and attracted to her Tuesday receptions the world of letters and society. Literature was the chief topic discussed at these gatherings, where the modern school, represented by Fontenelle and Lamotte, predominated. Some six years later, in the salon of Mme de Tencin, from 1726 onwards and still more so from 1733 — the year of Mme de Lambert's demise — to 1749, philosophy as well as politics began to attract attention. Social gatherings were more numerous, while less exclusive : they were attended by financial magnates and foreigners. But the ruling influence of the salons was not at its height until after 1750.

XVI

THE CLASSICAL TRADITION AND THE LITERATURE
OF SENTIMENT

1. The decay of the classical "genres" : Tragedy, Comedy,
Pulpit oratory.

The decay of the classical "genres" had set in as early as the close of the 17th century, when second-rate authors were already seen to copy the masters or to attempt, more or less felicitously, to strike out a path of their own. If it is necessary, therefore, to glance back to a somewhat earlier period, in order to obtain a view of the movement as a whole.

The retreat of Racine in 1677 had left the field clear for a host of inferior tragic poets — Campistron, Longepierre, La Fosse, Lagrange-Chancel — whose works received the applause of their contemporaries, but have long since been forgotten. **Crébillon** (1675-1762) endeavoured to renovate the dramatic art by the introduction of romantic plots and especially of the most lurid horrors. "Corneille, he is said to have observed, has taken the earth, Racine, heaven; for me hell alone remains". His aim, indeed, is not to excite pity, or admiration, but terror. His best tragedy is *Electre* (1708); his most famous, *Rhadamiste et Zénobie* (1711). For more than forty years, he provided material for the tragic stage. His *Catilina* dates from 1748. He has hit upon situations of stern grandeur and his style does not lack firmness.

In **Voltaire**, Crébillon found a formidable rival. That extraordinary man, whose work as a whole we shall study later on, was passionately fond of the stage. For sixty years, amid the occupations and vicissitudes of a feverish life, he never ceased to compose dramatic works, the first and the last of which were tragedies : *Oedipe* (1718), *Ivène* (1778). Voltaire adheres to a classical form, and is an imitator of Corneille and Racine. But he extends the domain of tragedy by turning for some of his themes to the sphere of ethics and politics; he takes his characters from every country; and he improves the *mise en scène*. The best of his tragedies were those he wrote before 1750.

Gravitating around Crébillon and Voltaire, there were other tragic writers whose names it is needless to mention. Tragedy, in the 18th century, was an exhausted form of literature, which imitation alone kept alive.

Comedy was more flourishing, less restricted to mere imitation. But it neglects the study of character in favour of the delineation of manners.

Dufresny (1648-1734) was not original. The interest attaching to his comedies resides rather in the novelty of the situations and in spirited dialogue. The most pleasing of his productions are : *L'Esprit de contradiction* (1700), *Le double Veuve* (1702), *Réconciliation normande* (1719). His *Amusements sérieux et comiques d'un Siamois* may have suggested to Montesquieu the general idea and the setting of the *Lettres persanes*.

Régnard (1655-1709) is an imitator of Molière ; but he is of a more sprightly disposition and he has put more movement into his plays : *Le Joueur* (1696), *Le Distrait* (1697), *Les Folies amoureuses* (1704), *Les Ménechmes* (1705), *Le Légataire universel* (1708) — all of which are full of charming fancy, spirited and witty, and written above all in a perfectly delightful style.

Dancourt (1661-1725) excelled in depicting the manners of his age. He takes his subjects from the lawcourts and the general etopics of the day, and has a tendency withal to extend his observation to a whole class of society. His best comedy is *Le Chevalier à la mode* (1687), the tone of which is pleasing, without excessive sprightliness, but also free from satire.

Lesage (1668-1747), has left us in *Turcaret* (1707) a masterpiece of penetrating observation, as well as the earliest play in which the study of character is superseded by that of a social condition. It is the world of finance that is here depicted, and the treatment is so realistic that it becomes true satire. There is not a single character in the play that calls forth our sympathy.

The same tendency to deal with the picturesque side of manners, that is observable in **Lesage's** comedies, makes itself felt likewise in his novels. His *Diable boiteux* (1707) is copied from the Spanish. The demon Asmodée bears up Don Cleophas above Madrid, removes the roofs of the houses and enables him to see all that is going on inside : a good opportunity for the author to depict society and its manners. *Gil Blas* (1715-1735) is a much more important work, and if in this case also **Lesage** imitates the Spanish literature and is indebted for many episodes to the picaresque novels, what constitutes the real value of his book is his own : his observations as regards the society of his age and certain traits belonging to all mankind throughout the ages. The leading character is an adventurer of the race of valets. He is a regular Jack-of-all-trades, which permits the author to depict every social condition and to parade before us, not without a certain scepticism, the various classes of society. **Lesage** was thus the originator of the novel of manners in France, and he remains one of the masters of French fiction.

La Métromanie (1738), by **Piron**, is far less a study of character than a satire directed against a harmless foible : the mania of the bourgeois for writing poetry and plays. The greatest charm of this comedy is the lively style in which it is written.

Destouches (1680-1754) attempts in *Le Glorieux* to renew

History of French Literature.

the tradition of the great classics and to revive the comedy of character.

But this study of vanity and pride is lacking both in depth and comic vivacity while overburdened with moral disquisitions.

Le Méchant (1747), by **Gresset**, is an excellent comedy. The author has succeeded in drawing a vigorous portrait of a selfish profligate, and cold-blooded scoffer, who contrives by all manner of wily schemes to set everybody at loggerheads, and propounds the most cynical theories in a tone of banter.

There is still much talent, wit and charm to be found in the comedies of the first half of the 18th century. But the successors of Molière have divided up his inheritance and doled it out piecemeal to the public.

Allowing for the difference of talent and style, **Massillon** (1663-1742) is to Bos-



FRONTISPIECE TO "LE DIABLE BOITEUX"
in the 1726 edition.

Asmodee, the one-legged devil, appears to the student Don Cleophas in the magician's workroom. In the scroll may be read the Spanish title of Guevara's book, from which the romance of Lesage is imitated.

suet what Regnard is to Molière. All the critics of the 18th century looked upon him as one of the most perfect orators of the pulpit, while Voltaire sums him up as "the preacher with the most perfect knowledge of the world, more flowery than Bourdaloue, more pleasing withal, and whose eloquence smacks of the courtier, the Academician and the wit; a philosopher, moreover, both temperate and tolerant." The subject of this encomium would perhaps not have appreciated it, for Massillon was, to a much higher degree than these lines would lead us to suppose, a Christian preacher, adhering to a severe code of morality. What is true, however, is that, as regards the matter, he studiously kept dogma in the background of his discourses, and as regards the form, the sturdy and familiar simplicity of Bossuet, the learned and solemn art of Bourdaloue, have given way to an eloquence of an elaborate, ornate and academic character, somewhat too solicitous of the seductive quality. Massillon brings to bear all the resources of rhetoric in connection with a style that is henceforward exhausted.

Before parting from these continuators of the classical tradition in the first half of the 18th century, we cannot but mention "le bon **Rollin**", (1661-1741) whose *Traité des Etudes* (1726) was for a long time the breviary of youth and its educators. In his *Histoire ancienne* (1730) and his voluminous *Histoire romaine* (1738) he extols antiquity, whose ideas and models he popularised among the generations that were eventually the authors of the Revolution.

2. The Reaction of Sentiment.

It was towards the end of the 17th century — with Fénelon — that that awakening of sensibility, that taste for the softer emotions, that need of sympathy, began to assert themselves, which culminated later on in the sentimental exaltation of Rousseau, his admirers and disciples. The worthy Abbé **de Saint-Pierre** (1658-1743), the inventor of the word "*bienfaisance*", and the author of the far-famed *Projet de paix perpétuelle* (1717) presently brought into fashion the love of mankind. One of Massillon's sermons bore the title of *Sur l'humanité des grands envers le peuple*, and the pervading spirit of all his sermons is "humanitarian". The philosophical idea of the kindness of nature makes its appearance at about the same time. That idea is already contained in the pastoral, Arcadian dream that haunts the imagination of Fénelon and calls up visions of a golden age when there flourished a simple-minded and naturally lovable humanity. But the great theoretical expounder of sensibility was the moralist **Vauvenargues** (1715-1747). This staid and serious stoic, who died at the age of thirty-two, overwhelmed by his sufferings, was

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an optimist and an enthusiast. No doubt he is a believer in the great part played by the understanding and in the supreme control of reason. But he considers sentiment to be superior to reason (*Introduction à la connaissance de l'esprit humain*, 1746). as against La Rochefoucauld, his refutation of whose theories is not very convincing. However he attempts to rehabilitate the instinct and the passions; he seeks in the heart the foundation of moral life, the inspiration of human intelligence, and the essential principle of criticism. His are the sayings: "Great thoughts spring from the heart", and "Without depth of feeling there can be no taste".

As a delineator of character he is very inferior to La Bruyère, whom he imitates and whose picturesque precision he lacks. As an author of maxims, he falls far short of La Rochefoucauld's caustic conciseness. Both these styles moreover are in a state of decay.

Vauvenargues was not vouchsafed time to mature and deepen his thought or to organise his doctrine. It is to be supposed that between the advocates of a return to nature and the apologists of material progress — between Rousseau and the *Encyclopédie* — he would have devised a code of ethics worthy of the name.

A like reaction of sentiment is observable as regards the drama in the highly original attempt made by **Nivelle de la Chaussée** (1692-1754) to renovate comedy by substituting for the setting forth of ridiculous foibles the delineation of the sufferings and sorrows of everyday life and especially of domestic tribulations. *Mélanide* (1741) met with a very marked success. Unfortunately La Chaussée was prone to exaggerate the transports of sensibility and too lavish of exclamations and tears. A still more unfortunate circumstance is his lack of art and style.

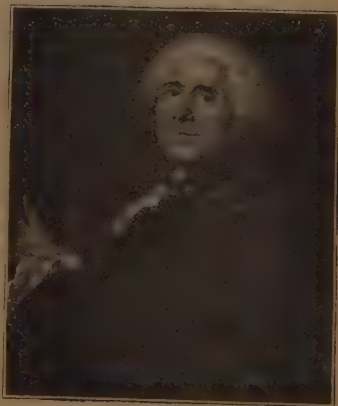
In 1731 was published the *Histoire du Chevalier des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut*, which attracted but very little notice. It was the seventh instalment of a diffuse novel entitled *Mémoires d'un homme de qualité*. The author, Abbé **Prévost** (1697-1763), was a very prolific and quaint writer, to whose credit stands the fact that he was the first to make us acquainted with English literature. He translated Richardson (**Paméla**, 1742; **Clarissa Harlowe**, 1751), thereby exerting an undoubted influence over his age. He likewise published a newspaper, *Le Pour et le Contre*, in which he has much to say about England. But of all his writings, the only one that survives to-day is the small novel *Manon Lescaut*, the tale of an overmastering passion which is at grips with the meanness of the characters and the miseries of human existence, and engrosses two beings and devours their souls and their very lives. The sincerity of the analysis causes us to lose sight of the despicable morality of the leading characters. As for the style, it passes unperceived through sheer naturalness: the sensation produced is that of life itself.

History Classical Tradition and the Literature of Sentiment.

It is chiefly in the writings of **Marivaux** (1688-1763) that this awakening of sensibility is discernible, together with many another tendency. Marivaux, who also edited a newspaper, *Le Spectateur français* (1722-1723), a collection of moral essays in imitation of Addison's *Spectator*, was both a novelist and a dramatic author.

In the *Vie de Marianne* (1731-1741) and *Le Paysan parvenu* (1735-1736), the novel begins to depict men and women of average condition: the middle class and the people. We find in these works a number of highly diversified and consummately natural personages, somewhat wanting in colour at first, but their figures and characters gradually assume greater precision as the tale proceeds, Marivaux affords us a careful and accurate delineation of various surroundings: the convent, the salon, the shop and the public street. There are "interiors" in **Marianne** that remind us of those painted at the same period by Chardin; there are likewise "street scenes" of a highly pleasing and quaint realism. But there are, more especially, a great number of psychological analyses, many moral reflections and even digressions, and above all a great display of sensibility. The theme of *Marianne*, the life history of a young orphan girl who experiences so many sufferings and dangers, lent itself to the working up of emotion. Here Marivaux gives free play to effusiveness and tears: satire, for the indulgence in which plentiful opportunities were afforded, gives way to softer feelings.

But Marivaux is above all a dramatic author. After an unfortunate attempt at the tragic style, in *Annibal*, he wrote for the "Comédie Italienne" which had recently been revived in 1710,



MARIVAUX

After the portrait painted by Van Loo and belonging to the Comédie Française.

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Here he enjoyed greater freedom than at the Comédie Française, and was less bound by rules and precedents. He began by a sentimental play, *Arlequin poli par l'amour* (1720), all sparkling with poetic fancy and reminiscent, though with less power and refinement, of Shakespeare's *Tempest* or *As You Like It*. In its fanciful setting, this production is a comedy of analysis and inaugurates a style in which Marivaux is without a rival. His talent, more varied than is generally supposed at the present time, exercises itself likewise in satirical or philosophical plays: *Le triomphe de Plutus* (1728), levelled at the financiers; *L'Ile des Esclaves* (1725), the burden of which is that all men are equal; the *Nouvelle Colonie* (1729), in which he depicts a league of women for the enfranchisement of their sex. This part of his work, however, has fallen into oblivion. The plays that are still performed and will stand for ever as the representatives in French dramatic literature of the genius of Marivaux, are *La Surprise de l'Amour* (1721), *La Double Inconvenance* (1723), *Le Jeu de l'Amour et du Hasard* (1730), *Le Legs* (1736), *Les Fausses Confidences* (1737), and *L'Epreuve* (1740).

Everything is novel in these exquisite, delightful and romantic dramatic productions. Marivaux realised that people were getting tired of imitations of Molière and of the traditional comic conventions. He conceived the idea of doing something quite different, of transplanting into comedy that element of love to which the tragedies of Racine owed so much of their power. He picked out in the manners of his age all that went to make up its supreme elegance, its exquisite refinement of mien and tone; he pictured to himself an ideal society, a dreamland that should be to comedy what the heroic world of legend or history was to tragedy, thus creating a world of his own, the world of Silvia and Dorante, of Lucidor and Araminte, into which he transposed the easy and amiable life of his age. That world, moreover, may be said to have been already in existence: it was the world of gallant festivals that Watteau had painted in the sunny clearings, the soft light of the parks and the cool green woodlands. Round his amorous couples, Marivaux arrays in groups figures of real life, resembling those of our novels, and personages of pure fancy, the Arlequins, Trivelins, Martons and Lisettes — designing valets and pert maid-servants, taken bodily from the Italian Comedy, or seeming to have stepped down from one of Watteau's paintings.

The comedies of Marivaux borrow their often highly romantic themes from the comedy of intrigue, but soon divert the action towards psychological development: their real subject matter is the serious and penetrative delineation of love; their true interest resides in the analysis of some love tale. Marivaux dwells for preference upon the awakening stage of the tender passion; he depicts its doubts and fears, its artless schemes and

The Classical Tradition and the Literature of Sentiments

all the workings of the heart — but of hearts that are capable of loving. Naturally the feminine characters are well to the fore, and there are few more charming figures on any stage than these



THE ACTORS IN THE "COMEDY ITALIENNA"

After a picture by Lancret. (1690-1741).

The actors are represented in the traditional roles : Aslequin, Pierrot, Colombine etc. The pictures of Lancret and Watteau evoke that characteristic of charming fancy that distinguishes the new Italian comedy in France. The work of Marivaux is the most delicate expression of this creation.

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fair lovers, with their modest and graceful deportment, their reserved yet candid speech, with unblemished virtue and seemly happiness for their ideal — the flower-like creations of the French genius.

An essential requisite of this new drama was a novel mode of expression. Marivaux has given his name to a special style — “*marivaudage*” — that has all the elegance of polite conversation, the delicacy of a secret imparted to a bosom friend, that is full of wit and refinement, sometimes to the verge of affectation. And this delightful style of comedy disappeared with its author, to be revived and renewed, a century later, by Alfred de Musset.

XVII

THE PHILOSOPHICAL LITERATURE : MONTESQUIEU AND BUFFON

In this first period, during which pure literature does not aspire beyond the docile imitation of the previous century, Montesquieu and Buffon begin to manifest the spirit of the new age. They have both, moreover, fallen under the influence of English ideas and have been able to acquire them at their very source : Montesquieu by passing eighteen months in England, and Buffon in translating Hales and Newton. Applying themselves to the study of society and nature, they have completed the description of man as a moral being, in which aspect he had been considered too abstractly in the preceding century.

1. Montesquieu.

Charles de Secondat, baron de Montesquieu (1689-1755) was first a councillor, then the president, of the *parlement* of Bordeaux. After undertaking a number of journeys to different parts of Europe, for the purpose of gathering materials for the great work on jurisprudence whereat he laboured all his life, he spent the greater part of his time in studious retirement at his country seat of La Brède, near Bordeaux.

A few tales of travel had brought Asia into fashion in France, as far back as the end of the 17th century. The translation of the Arabian Tales, published by Galland in 1708, had stimulated public curiosity with regard to the East. The contrast it presented with the West was so striking, that it was an obvious device to criticise French manners, foibles and prejudices through the mouth of an Eastern traveller. We have already seen that Dufresny had written in 1707 the *Amusements sérieux et comiques d'un Siamois*.

The *Lettres persanes* (1721) belong to the same order of fiction.

This witty and often profound composition combines the portrayal of manners with a satire of the society and institutions of the author's countrymen. It partakes of the novel by the nature of its plot, recalls La Bruyère and the moralists by the passages in which Montesquieu inveighs against the manners and ridiculous follies of the time, while the chapters in which he deals with political and religious questions foreshadow his *Esprit des Lois*.

His *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence* (1734) is the earliest work in which the philosophy of history is applied without laying theology under contribution. A great admirer of the Romans, Montesquieu accounts for their greatness by ascribing it to their virtues and general policy. But he chiefly attaches himself to the study of their decadence, of which he defines the political rather than the moral causes. He forgets, indeed, and this may be considered as a serious omission, the efficacy of the religion of the Romans themselves.

The *Esprit des Lois* (1748) is a study of laws in their relation to government, religion, manners and latitude. Its author interprets the institutions of the various peoples; he enquires, that is to say, into the relations existing between several legislations and the peoples governed thereby. It is a work of philosophical and historical jurisprudence, with the adjunction of political chapters (study of the Constitutions), scientific chapters (theory of climates) and of very profound theories as regards the nature of governments and the legitimate character of authority. The



MONTESQUIEU.

After a marble bust preserved at the Bordeaux Museum.

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author first takes the facts and attempts to explain them, thus distinguishing himself from all abstract theoreticians. The spirit of his book is liberalism : Montesquieu is the first in point of time of the great apostles of liberty in the 18th century.

Though endowed with sound judgment and keen insight, Montesquieu has not the comprehensive breadth of view, the gift of marshalling his facts in their proper order and concatenation, that permits of a rigorous presentation. His style too is abrupt and jerky, like his chapters, and is not exempt from affectation and over-refinement. Mme du Deffand described the *Esprit des lois*, as "*de l'esprit sur les lois*", as though its chief merit was the wit displayed by Montesquieu in his treatment of the subject, Nevertheless, by its brilliancy, by its precision and appropriateness of expression, the style of Montesquieu stamps him as a great writer.

2. Buffon.

Georges-Louis Leclerc de **Buffon** (1707-1788), the son of a councillor in the *parlement* of Burgundy, was born at the Château de Montbard, in that province. In 1730, he set out on a series of travels with a young Englishman, the Duke of Kingston, whose private tutor, one Hinckmann, was very fond of natural history. After a tour in the west and in the south of France, he visited Italy, returning through Switzerland, and then crossed over to England, where he remained for some time. Here he interested himself in the study of mathematics. In 1739 he was appointed curator of the "Jardin du Roi" (now the Jardin des Plantes), and from that time onwards he devoted his whole life to the composition of his *Histoire naturelle*, the first three volumes of which were published in 1749. He mingled but little with the society of his time, nor did he take part in the philosophical strife wherein we shall find his great contemporaries engaged. His learned work unfolds itself with majestic simplicity and perfect unity, and though it belongs in point of time to the second half of the 18th century, it places the author by the side of Montesquieu, rather than of Voltaire and Rousseau.

Buffon proved himself at first a conscientious observer, working upon samples and documents. But he tired eventually of the descriptive side of natural history and engaged several assistants. His genius inclined him more particularly towards synthetic methods and led him to frame the hypotheses in which he forestalls the great modern discoveries, as for instance in the *Théorie de la Terre*. He embodies the poetry of universal life in the *Epoques de la Nature* (1778).

A stranger to passion, he did not make science an instrument of polemics. He expounds natural history for its own sake and not for the purpose of sapping social institutions or moral creeds.

The Philosophical Literature : Montesquieu and Buffon.

While others reduced man to the status of an animal, Buffon assigned to him a place apart in creation above all other living beings.

The main service rendered by the *Histoire naturelle* was to introduce into the realm of literature a whole number of ideas of which science alone had up till then taken cognisance, thus adding to it after Calvin, after Pascal, after Montesquieu, a new province : physical man and all nature.

In his *Discours de réception à l'Académie française* (1753), in which he declares his views concerning style, Buffon advises the scientists who, like himself, expound their theories and discoveries, to render them accessible to all by eschewing the terminology of specialists. That is what he means by the oft misinterpreted precept "to use none but general terms".

According to this scientist, about to take his seat among men of letters, the whole art of writing resides in composition. "Style", he avers, "is but the order and movement the writer puts into his thoughts". Such order and movement constitute the original contribution of the writer, his own imprint, what comes from himself. "Style proceeds from the man himself," he observes. This formula has not always been rightly comprehended, nay, it is habitually shortened into "Style is the man", that is to say, the expression of his character and temperament. Buffon's



BUFFON

After an engraved portrait by A. Pujos

In the accessories of this picture the artist expresses the high appreciation that the contemporaries of Buffon entertained for his genius.

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idea is somewhat different : the ideas themselves are common property and the writer makes them his own just in so far as he expresses them in such a way that it becomes evident he has thought them out on his own account.

Buffon himself was a great writer, who succeeded in breathing life into scenes of surpassing grandeur. He was endowed with that scientific imagination which enables a man to represent the world in the various phases of its history, the various degrees of its development. If he gave in to a taste for magniloquence and pomposity, it was out of a sort of respect for the dignity of his subject. Such was doubtless the opinion of his contemporaries, when in his lifetime they erected in his honour a statue in the Jardin du Roi, with this inscription : *Majestati naturæ par ingenium*, " his genius was equal to the majesty of nature ".

XVIII VOLTAIRE

The name and the work of **Voltaire** (François-Marie Arouet, 1694-1778) fill up practically the whole of the 18th century. That extensive work is divided into two parts, the first of which corresponds to the first period we have been considering, the second to the next. With him we pass naturally from the one to the other : he is the central figure of his age.

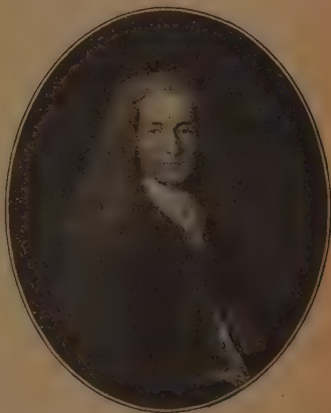
During the first half of the century, from his auspicious start in literature with the tragedy of *Oedipe* (1719), down to his sojourn in Prussia (1750), Voltaire is but the greatest of the classics of the 18th century. He was a great admirer of the preceding age and we feel him to be thoroughly imbued with the principles of the *Art poétique* ; he remains, as a literary writer, a disciple of Boileau. He had a natural love of order, clearness and moderation, one and all of which are truly classical qualities, and he was instrumental in preserving good taste and the sense of art in an age of prose. He attempted the great classical "genres" : the epic and tragedy.

His ideas concerning the epic are more valuable than his epic poem. If this great wit, after beginning by light poetry, be thought himself of launching forth on an epic, it must clearly have been on account of the prestige attaching to this style of production in the eyes of one possessed of such a classical turn of mind, and also because of his fondness for history. The *Henriade* (1723-1728) he considered, moreover, as a kind of setting wherein to present, under a poetic form, certain ideas gathered by him during the three years he spent in England (1726-1728) — a period of outstanding importance in the history of his ideas. In the preceding century, under the Stuarts and more particularly under

Charles II. English literature, had been content to imitate the French. From 1688 onwards and under the influence of Locke, the reverse was the case : it was now England that exerted an influence over France. From England Montesquieu borrowed his political theories, Condillac his psychology, Voltaire his philosophical ideas and his innovations in tragedy.

He was passionately fond of the theatre, in which he took a lifelong interest. For

sixty years, from 1718 to 1776, he never ceased, amid the multifarious occupations and vicissitudes of a feverish existence, to compose tragedies and even comedies. He had his plays performed in his own house, distributing the parts among his guests, whether they liked it or not. Owing to the importance of his dramatic production, his contemporaries placed him on a level with Corneille and Racine. In our days the judgment passed on the tragedies of Voltaire is all too severe. No doubt he was vastly inferior to Corneille and to Racine as regards elevation and truth of feeling, as well as in force and quality of style. In a general way, he merely imitates those writers, making



VOLTAIRE AT TWENTY-FOUR

After a portrait by Largillière preserved at the Carnavalet Museum.

the tragic interest consist essentially in a crisis born of the conflict of sentiments. His ideal remains more particularly that of the tragedy of Racine, that is to say, elegance and harmony of style, the observance of the unities, the moral character of the action, the overmastering power of the passions. But he had seen Shakespeare performed at the Drury Lane Theatre, he had perused his works and become acquainted with a dramatic conception entirely different from the French classical tragedy. Some part of this he imported into France — not very much indeed, for in reading Shakespeare Voltaire is still under the domin-

ation of the classical taste : he restricts his admiration to certain parts of his work, and far from recognising the possibility of presenting on the French stage a play of the English bard's in its entirety, he is content to infuse a greater measure of movement and activity into his regular tragedies : he is partial to sudden changes of feeling, to "coups de théâtre", to all that can stimulate curiosity and attract attention. He widens the field of psychological observation, which in the 17th century had been restricted practically to love and ambition ; he takes his themes from French history and in a general way from every country under the sun, leading us in turns to Jerusalem, to Peru, to Sicily in the Middle Ages, to Mecca, to Constantinople, to China, to the land of the Scythians and elsewhere. True these characters, whatever the place of their birth, express themselves after the fashion of the Paris salons ; but it may be said at least that Voltaire pays some attention to outward local colour and attaches greater importance than was the case before him to matters of setting and costume. The best tragedies of Voltaire — *Zaire* (1732), *Alzire* (1736), *Mérope* (1743), *Sémiramis* (1748) — date from before 1750. During the latter part of his career, tragedy becomes in his case a pamphlet in five acts and in verse, crammed full of tedious philosophical tirades.

When in 1759 Letourneur began to publish his translation of Shakespeare, Voltaire waxed highly indignant. He prided himself upon having revealed to his countrymen all they needed to know of those works and to have borrowed from the English dramatist all he was capable of imparting to them. In 1776 the testy polemist could no longer restrain himself, but must needs write a *Mémoire à l'Académie française*, in which the greatest tragic poet the world has produced was spoken of as a "drunken savage" and a "market-fair mountebank".

After his return from England, Voltaire did not restrict himself to the writing of tragedies. He composed and published in 1734 the *Lettres philosophiques*, or *Lettres anglaises*, by which we may perceive what were his impressions when in London, and what benefit he derived from that period of exile. Both his mind and his taste were trained to advantage in England, where he enjoyed a political and religious liberty to the value of which he was fully alive. Here he was received on a footing of equality by Ministers of State and the nobility : he imbibed the spirit of the citizen and the philosopher. Henceforward, independence in its every shape and form was a necessity for him, and of this he went in quest to the Château de Cirey, the seat in Lorraine of the Marquise du Châtelet.

The publication of the *Lettres anglaises* had raised a storm. In them Voltaire drew a parallel between the two nations, and his praise of England was indirectly a political, social and religious satire levelled at France. Fearing, not without reason, that the government would visit its anger upon him, he sought refuge in

the territory of the Duke of Lorraine (1). The Marquise du Châtelet was a woman of a serious turn of mind, passionately fond of intellectual pursuits, and interested above all in science. Under her roof, Voltaire did much good work : he composed his *Essai sur la philosophie de Newton*, a few of his best tragedies, his earliest and most valuable novels, and started upon his *Siècle de Louis XIV.*

He entered into relations with Frederick, then Prince Royal of Prussia, as early as 1736. The Prince was a man of letters and

an admirer of Voltaire, whom he would fain have attracted to his Court, but Mme du Châtelet would not hear of his departure. In 1740 Frederick became King of Prussia and made a fresh appeal to Voltaire. A first meeting took place the same year at a chateau in the vicinity of Clèves. Voltaire, who had just come into favour again with Louis the Fifteenth's govern-



VOLTAIRE AT WORK

After a wooden model, preserved at the Carnavalet Museum. This statuette is a witness to the popularity of Voltaire in his old age.

ment, and was desirous of serving it in some official quality, proposed to the Prime Minister, Cardinal Fleury, to undertake the task of winning over to France the King of Prussia, whose policy appeared still doubtful. He failed conspicuously, however, in the mission entrusted to him and never perceived that for all his bright wit he was a mere puppet in the hands of Frederick. A second journey, in 1743, was equally barren in results. Mme du Châtelet having died in 1749, Voltaire made up his mind, the year after, to comply with Frederick's request that he should

(1) The Duchy of Lorraine belonged at the time to Stanislas Leczinski, father-in-law of king Louis XV, on the understanding that it should revert to France on the Duke's demise.

come to Potsdam. Fascinated by the splendour of Versailles, the great memories of Louis XIV and the effulgence of French wit and learning, the King of Prussia had gathered round him a number of wits and scholars, mostly Frenchmen, and had founded at Berlin an Academy presided over by a native of France, Maupertuis. He believed himself to be a past master of French style and laid claim to the title of philosopher. It was his ambition to reign by force of wit as well as by force of arms, and he prepared for the intended domination with his small cosmopolitan band of courtiers, which had been joined by an Italian, Algarotti, and an Irishman, Tyrconnel. Suppers, theatricals and the revision of the King's writings took up the whole of Voltaire's time. He contrived, however, with the Jew Hirsch, to become entangled in certain speculations which had their termination in the law-courts. At this was highly displeased the King.

The relations between the two friends had become very strained, for they had not been long in judging each other for what they were worth and in answering contempt with contempt. Voltaire's quarrel with Maupertuis and the lampoon written by him under its inspiration, the noted *Diatribes du Docteur Akakia*, were made to serve as a pretext for the final break. Voltaire left Berlin on March 26th, 1753. He had done but little work during the past three years; yet his situation had benefited by the fact of his having shared the intimacy of an illustrious monarch. His intellectual kingship was about to begin.

With a view to providing himself with a safe retreat, Voltaire began (1756) by settling in a country seat, which he called Les Délices, in the neighbourhood of Geneva. But he soon perceived that he would not remain long on good terms with the Consistory of the Republic, and purchased the estate of Ferney, where he spent the last twenty years of his life as the absolute ruler of European opinion. He returned to Paris in time to die there in the midst of triumphal ovations, in 1778.

During the latter period, when literature was chiefly philosophical and militant, Voltaire turned out works of every description. He did not cease to compose tragedies, indited numerous epistles, full of wit and grace, prepared or edited historical writings involving patient research, while his action chiefly makes itself felt by means of pamphlets, satires, articles in the *Encyclopédie* — which latter he collected in 1764, as material for his *Dictionnaire philosophique* — and of his correspondence. He diffused, among the masses that irreverence towards religion for which his name has stood in France ever since, but at the same time an infinitely more praiseworthy sentiment, a sense of tolerance. He was an ardent defender of all such as he considered to be the victims of religious bigotry or of a miscarriage of justice (Calas, Sirven, La Barre, Lally-Tollendal). He built a manor-house, bestowed upon the village of Ferney sundry factories for

making watches and clocks, and a parish church in which he owned a pew as lord of the manor. He grew to be known as the "patriarche de Ferney" and ended by holding a sort of Court, to which he made welcome the people, of every sort and condition, that came to visit him.

A man of universal attainments, Voltaire attempted practically every form of writing. We have mentioned his epics and characterised his work as a tragic poet. He has left us in his *Histoire*



Photo Julien fr.

THE CHATEAU OF VOLTAIRE AT FERNEY

Near the Swiss frontier, in its present state.

Voltaire passed the last twenty years of his life here.

de Charles XII (1731) a model of narrative history; in the *Siècle de Louis XIV* (1751-1765), a model of political history; in his *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations* (1756), a model of philosophical history. He has won a highly honourable and brilliant place among historians by his scrupulous respect for the sources, his keenness in the quest of documents, his skill in comparing them and turning them to account; by the interest he evinces in the study of manners and customs, of finance and of all that reveals the inner life of a nation, notably in letters and art; by the relations he constantly establishes as between the nations of the world, with a view to following up the development of mankind throughout the ages; and finally by his style, which is a very model of perfect narration.

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Voltaire excelled in the secondary forms of literary production : the short novel (*Zadig*, 1748 ; *Candide ou l'optimisme*, 1759 ; *La Princesse de Babylone*, 1768) ; in philosophical poetry (*Discours sur l'Homme* (1738-40) ; in the epistle and the satire ; in light poetry,



THE CROWNING OF VOLTAIRE'S BUST

At the sixth performance of his tragedy "*Irene*", March 30, 1778.

After a print by Moreau the younger.

Voltaire, who returned to Paris in the preceding month at the age of eighty three, is seen in his box in the upper left-hand corner.

He was very inferior in comedy, wherein his wit and even his style are conspicuous by their absence (*L'Enfant prodigue* ; *Narcisse*).

His very extensive *Correspondance* is a most valuable mine of information regarding the 18th century. There have been preserved some twelve thousand letters of his, addressed to seven hundred correspondents, personal friends, ladies of quality, philosophers and writers, statesmen, magistrates, noblemen, strangers of distinction, nay even princes, queens and kings. The whole of polite society in the 18th century, both in France and abroad, entertained epistolary relations with Voltaire and this huge mass

of correspondence constitutes perhaps the most living part of his work, that in which we are best able to perceive his whole personality, his universal spirit of enquiry, his wit, his infatuations, his enthusiasms and his hatreds. The shortest of his notes, scribbled off or dictated in a hurry, are frequently small masterpieces. In these, perhaps, his writing also is at its best. He expresses himself with matchless simplicity, clearness and precision, while using the language common to everybody, and without our perceiving any special method in his style, the natural ease of which has never been surpassed.

Much harder is it to estimate his work as a whole and the nature of his genius. Literary historians and critics have expressed conflicting views on this subject. It cannot be denied that his thought was rather comprehensive, clear and lucid, than original. In no branch of literature was he actually an innovator. He was possessed of an untiringly inquisitive turn of mind and an exceptional power of popularisation. In this respect he represents one of the sides of the French genius : universality. He likewise represents its perspicuity, its spirit. He is the very embodiment of what in the 18th century was meant by the word "esprit", viz. that peculiar compound of gaiety, malice and irony which constitutes the charm of lighter productions and the flavouring of more serious works. But he is not, as has sometimes been stated, the most qualified representative of the French genius. Even after we have excised all the meaner portions of his work, — his indecent jests and his rancorous polemics, — what remains cannot be accounted to rank as high as the great masterpieces of French classical literature : the tragedies of Corneille and Racine, the *Pensées* of Pascal, the comedies of Molière, the *Fables* of La Fontaine or the *Sermons* of Bossuet. None the less is Voltaire the most complete representative of the French 18th century and one of the greatest writers the French language can boast of.

XIX

THE PHILOSOPHICAL STRUGGLE

1. The *Encyclopédie*.

The latter half of Voltaire's life and the writings referable to that time have already prepared us for the militant attitude taken up by literature, from 1750 onwards. This period is filled up by the compilation and publication of the *Encyclopédie* (1751-1772). In 1745, a French bookseller bethought himself of translating Chambers's *Cyclopaedia*, published in London in 1727. But he soon found that in many respects that work was already out of



FRONTISPICE TO THE *Encyclopédie* (1765), by Ch.-N. Cochin.

The artist has represented the sciences, arts and handicrafts aspiring to Truth. The Sciences seek to tear away her veils: Imagination comes to adorn her with flowers. Below are to be noted the figures that symbolise the industrial arts and recall the importance given in the *Encyclopédie* to technical conceptions in the province of industry.

date, so he entrusted Diderot and d'Alembert with the task of compiling another, that should be entirely original. In 1750, Diderot published a prospectus exposing the object and scope of the new work and stating the terms on which it was offered to subscribers. The first two volumes were published in 1751, preceded by the *Discours préliminaire*, in which d'Alembert gave an account of the progress of the human mind and a general classification of the sciences. Suspended for a few months in 1751-1752, and again for two years as from 1757, the work at last reached completion in 1772. It comprised seventeen volumes of text, a supplement in four volumes and eleven volumes of plates.

This huge publication, in which was to be summed up all the knowledge attained by about the middle of the century on every question of science, art, literature, philosophy and politics, contains articles of very unequal value. "It is a motley garment, made up of a few pieces of good cloth and an undue proportion of rags", was said of it by D'Alembert himself, whose collaboration came to an end in 1759. But one and the same current of thought pervades the entire work: the negation of established authority, of tradition, of faith, and absolute trust in progress towards an ideal of political and intellectual freedom. It was by reason of this general trend of thought that the *Encyclopédie*, in accordance with Diderot's purpose, eventually "altered the common way of thinking" and forwarded certain necessary social reforms. It had the effect, moreover, of speeding the progress and vulgarising the knowledge of applied science, of diffusing a spirit of scientific enquiry and a thirst for precision.

The *Encyclopédie*, large as is the place it fills in the history of ideas, is not of great interest as regards the history of literature, those who most assiduously contributed to it having been, for the great part, indifferent writers.

2. Diderot.

It was **Diderot** (1713-1784) who took the most active part in producing the *Encyclopédie*, who conceived, directed, and carried through that vast undertaking: he wrote many of the articles, more particularly such as dealt with ancient philosophy and the mechanical arts: he recruited the collaborators, stimulated their zeal, collected their articles, and bore the brunt of the difficulties of publication.

Denis Diderot, the son of a Langres cutler, came to Paris to complete his studies, and very soon derived his resources solely from his literary work. He always led a precarious, sometimes a poverty-stricken existence, nor was he able to become a member of the Académie. Towards the end of his life, when he found himself compelled to sell his books, the Empress of Russia Cath-

rine II, " the great Catherine ", purchased them from him while leaving them at his disposal.

Physically the figure of Diderot was as mutable as morally. His ideas had no consistency, because he himself was peculiarly apt to receive every impression, to take a passionate interest in every subject — art, literature, archaeology, mechanics — and was possessed of a sensitiveness that finds a vent in declamatory eloquence.

He left behind him a multitude of writings and not a single book. His constant improvisation was less characteristic of a writer than of a conversationalist. He would never have bethought himself of collecting in twenty volumes of *Œuvres complètes* the pages he personally had turned out on philosophy, art and literature. He was alive to his limitations and observed of himself : " I never compose, I am no-author ; I read or I converse, I question or I answer. "

The spirit that is revealed by those conversations is naturalism in its three aspects : metaphysical, social and moral. Matter is eternal, endowed with force ; it creates individuals and species alike, without plan and without aim. Diderot admits the unity of the universe, the sensibility of matter, universal life. In social life, he demands the suppression of the laws and rules of every kind that restrict our liberty and fetter the instinct. We

must give up every form of religion and morality. As a philosopher, Diderot is a materialist and an atheist.

His theories are expounded chiefly in short treatises : *Pensées philosophiques* (1746), *Lettre sur les aveugles à l'usage de ceux qui voient* (1749).

He wrote some short novels, the best of which, *Le Neveu de Rameau* (1763 ; published, 1823) is an amazing picture of manners, the central figure of which — a sorry knaves, who bears a striking resemblance to the author himself — expresses his feelings with equal verve and impudence. To the *Correspondance*, which his



BUST OF DIDEROT
By Houdon (Louvre Museum).

friend Grimm addressed from Paris to various German courts, Diderot contributed the reports of the picture Salons. He was thus the originator of art criticism. His own work in this line has had the reproach cast upon it of being too literary, of giving too much importance to the subject, too little to the technique, of the works he criticised. But it should be borne in mind that these descriptions of pictures were written for distant readers, whose interest it was desired to awaken in respect of pictures they had no opportunity of seeing.

His *Lettres* are one of the best parts of his work. In them he depicts himself in his every mood, particularly in the *Lettres à Mlle Volland*, and he speaks of everything : literature, the stage, the arts, philosophy, sociology, and the sciences.

Diderot has sketched out the theory of the so-called *drame*, an intermediary sort of play, ranking between tragedy and comedy, and considered by him to be more conformable to truth and nature. Ridiculous eccentricities and overwhelming passion are equally exceptional : the *drame*, on the other hand, would represent the characters in their average everyday surroundings and existence, with their normal sentiments and respective conditions. Condition is far more concrete, more real than character : a father, a mother, a workman, a judge, are interesting to present in certain situations, where the interest will have its origin in the contrast between their condition and the course of events. — Diderot's mistake lies in not having perceived that condition derives its whole interest from character. A judge, for instance, is not in himself a dramatic figure, but if he is possessed of some vice, some passion, then a conflict may arise between his condition and his character and therein resides the drama. The fact therefore is that character gains in interest when considered in relation to condition.

Diderot attempted to apply his theories in two dramas; *Le Père de famille* and *Le Fils Naturel*, both of which are failures. He was utterly devoid of dramatic genius. *Sedaine*, on the other hand, in *Le Philosophe sans le savoir* (1765), has given us a pleasing and dainty sketch of the new style of play.

3. The Teaching of the *Encyclopédie* and the Salons.

" Philosophy ", in the meaning assigned to the word by the 18th century, that is to say, a taste for freely discussing religion, institutions and manners, for criticising and amending them, and thus labouring to improve the conditions of life by progress, became a sustaining topic for conversation. Nor did it fail to be in great request at gatherings attended by men of letters, not excepting those where the latter mingled with high society : the coffee-houses and the salons. The famous Café Procope,

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opposite the old Comédie-Française became a centre for philosophical and literary discussions in which the most celebrated writers of the age took part. The Salons of the 18th century gave the foremost place to the man of letters, the "philosopher", and here were elaborated the ideas that ruled the age.

The most important of these gatherings was the salon of **Mme Geoffrin** (1699-1777). This "bourgeoise", whose husband had made a large fortune as director of the Compagnie des glaces, managed to take the first place as a society leader, and to keep it by dint of prudence, generosity and tact. On Mondays, Mme Geoffrin entertained her artist friends to dinner: the painters Vanloo, Vernet, Boucher; the pastelist Latour; the architect Soufflot; the sculptor Falconnet; the Comte de Caylus, a man of rare erudition, who was endeavouring at the time to renovate French art by the imitation of antiquity. On Wednesdays, she received men of letters and learning: all the writers in the *Encyclopédie*. Many foreigners of note attended her receptions, among others the witty Abbé Galiani a Neapolitan, whose correspondence with his Parisian friends, after he had left them to return to his native country, is so animated and entertaining, Horace Walpole, and the English historian Gibbon. Her salon was dubbed "the kingdom of the rue Saint-Honoré", and when Prince Stanislas-Auguste Poniatowski, whom Mme Geoffrin had brought up and tended like a mother, became King of Poland, she went to visit him at Warsaw and was received at Vienna by Joseph II and Maria-Theresa.

Mme du Deffand (1697-1780) admitted to her salon a few writers and savants: Fontenelle, Montesquieu, Condorcet, Miari-vaux and more particularly D'Alembert, for whom she conceived a sort of passion. Yet there high society was ever the predominating element.

She possessed a highly penetrative and brilliant mind, together with very uncommon literary tastes, and very personal opinions. Towards the close of her life she grew more and more distrustful of literary men, and became violently attached to the young Duchesse de Choiseul and to Horace Walpole. This infatuation, on the part of a woman who had embodied the sceptical spirit of the age, was intimately related to a general crisis of sentimentality, of which we will speak later on.

Still more immediately connected with that crisis was **Mlle de Lespinasse** (1732-1776). She had entered the service of Mme du Deffand, when that lady was stricken with blindness in 1752, and began by assisting her in her duties as hostess. Gradually however she gained an ascendancy that led to a break. In 1764 Mlle de Lespinasse withdrew, followed by D'Alembert and all the "Encyclopédistes". The salon of Mlle de Lespinasse soon became the citadel of militant philosophy.

There were yet other salons: those of d'Holbach, Helvetius,



THE CONCERT

Engraving by A.-J. Duclos, after a drawing by Augustin de Saint-Aubin.

This celebrated engraving is a most vivid and suggestive portrayal of the brilliant social gatherings of the Louis XV and Louis XVI periods.

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Mme Necker and Mme d'Epinay. Literary reputations were manufactured in these, and candidates to the Académie selected. On the whole, the influence of these gatherings did not always make for good. They promoted a habit of talking superficially about everything, of toying with ideas, of seeking merely to please. They led to an exaggeration of the fault-finding, scoffing tendencies of the French mind, of its subtle refinement and scepticism.

To appeal to these the better philosophy became less earnest, more aggressive and more dissolvent. Thus did high society in the 18th century prepare the way for the revolution which was about to sweep it out of existence.

4. Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

The position occupied by Rousseau in his age and in French literature is a very peculiar one. He is connected with the philosophers by his combative and revolutionary ardour, his criticism of social institutions, his contempt for tradition and his uncompromising individualism. He differs from them, and more particularly from the

writers in the *Encyclopédie*, by the substance of his philosophy, opposed to civilisation and progress, as well as by the tone of his polemics, in which reason is vivified by an intensity of poetic feeling. His work, moreover, presents a character of absolute novelty. While he had no precursors, his influence, on the contrary, was extensive: for half a century his mind animated the new era.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) has depicted himself in his *Confessions*, a posthumous relation of his life up to the age of fifty-four, when he began to write it. In this he cynically admits



JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU (1776)

After the portrait painted by Ramsay

the shameful errors of his existence, while revealing a disordered sensitiveness which eventually culminated in hypochondria. Born in Geneva of a family of French origin that had taken refuge there towards 1550 on account of the persecution exercised against the Protestants, and had obtained the freedom of the city, he received a romantic education, and after an early period of wandering took up his abode, when about twenty years old, with



VIEW OF LES CHARMETTES

In this charming spot in Savoy (near Chambéry) Jean-Jacques Rousseau passed five years of his youth in study and the enthusiastic contemplation of nature.

Mme de Warens, first at Annecy, then in Chambéry and at Les Charmettes. In 1741, he came to Paris with three hundred francs in his pocket and a new system of musical notation which he intended to submit to the Académie des Sciences, in the hope of deriving great pecuniary advantage therefrom. Disappointed in this direction, he was not above appealing to wealthy patrons, made the acquaintance of certain writers and people of social importance, and set out for Venice, in 1743, with the French Ambassador, M. de Montaigu. Finding it impossible to live in company with the great, towards whom he was alternately servile or insolent, he returned to Paris after a twelvemonth. Here he was received in society, wrote several operas, and was made much of generally, his very eccentricities being accounted interesting.

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It was at this time that he married Thérèse Levasseur, a maid-servant at an inn, by which act he poisoned his life. In 1749 the



EMILIUS AND SOPHIA

Engraving to illustrate "Emile". after Moreau the younger.

In the course of a repast, Emile is brought face to face with the young girl who, educated on the same principles as himself, is intended by his tutor to be the young man's wife, though Emile is not aware of this.

or imaginary enemies : *Lettre à Christophe de Beaumont* (1763), *Lettres écrites de la Montagne* (1764), his *Confessions* (1761-1771) and the *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*, both the latter published after his death. All these works are animated by one and the same spirit, and present a remarkable degree of unity.

success of his *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* brought him celebrity, while marking the advent of a period of fruitful production, during which he composed within twelve years the best of his works: the *Discours sur l'inégalité des conditions* (1754), the *Lettre à d'Alembert sur les spectacles* (1758), *Emile* (1762), expounding his ideas on education, the *Contrat social* (1762), an attempt at a reconstruction of society on the basis of absolute equality, and his novel *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761). The declining years of his life were devoted to apologetic writings, in which a prey to the mania of persecution he defends himself against his real

The philosophy of Rousseau may be summed up in three propositions : the state of nature is good, that of society, evil ; the latter, however, must be put up with, it being impossible to revert to a state of nature ; furthermore, the state of society may be amended by bringing it in various ways into greater conformity with the state of nature. The first of these propositions is developed in the two *Discours* mentioned above and in the *Lettre à d'Alembert* : the second is implicitly dealt with, practically throughout his writings ; the third and most important is the main theme of the three leading works in which Rousseau attempts to reconcile social man with natural man : as an individual, by means of an education conformable to nature (*Emile*) ; as a husband, by the practice of the natural virtues, substituted in the family circle for artificial passions and social conventions (*Nouvelle Héloïse*) ; as a citizen, by the loyal observation of the conditions on which, in the olden time, men agreed to submit to a certain form of government, the said conditions having been prescribed to them by nature (*Contrat social*).

The *Contrat social* develops the ideas which the Revolution, while still imbued with the spirit of Montesquieu at the time of the Assemblée Constituante, endeavoured to carry into practice under the Convention and the Comité de Salut Public. It is the plan of an ideal society, based upon the abstract idea of general equality and constituted after the model of the ancient cities. The most celebrated Conventionnels were disciples of Rousseau.

The originality of Rousseau as a writer is that with him sensitiveness and imagination were suddenly reintroduced into literature. Instead of the short, rapid phrase of Voltaire, the abrupt, jerky style used as a weapon by the literature of the 18th century, Rousseau adopted the broad, ample, harmonious period, upheld in turns by eloquence and poetry. His influence was as great in the literary as in the political sphere. It was he that prepared the revival of religious feeling, awakened the sense of nature, and fostered the birth of lyrical poetry, by giving free play to his personality. He was thus one of the precursors of the Romantic school, in whom are to be found some of the morbid sides of his own nature : the distemper common to his age, a spirit of rebellion against society and the theory of the irresistible fatality of passion.

XX

END OF THE CLASSICAL ERA AND PREPARATION
OF A NEW ART (1775-1795)

The period extending from 1775 to 1795 is one of extreme confusion. It may be characterised by saying that it marks the end of the classical era and the preparation of a new art, manifested by the birth of lyricism and the picturesque, together with the beginning of foreign influences and the revival of ancient art.

These twenty years witnessed the disruption of the elements, to the harmonious blending of which was due the perfection of the classical productions. The exercise of thought became a thing quite distinct from art and was manifested only in the shape of philosophical propaganda. Social life in the higher spheres was more brilliant than ever and fashioned witty conversation-alists, who embody the wit of the salons in their writings. One of these authors — Beaumarchais — exceeded the average of his age and produced the work in which is to be found the best delineation of the spirit of that brilliant, somewhat heedless and indiscreet society : *Le mariage de Figaro*.

Meanwhile those writers who aim at continuing the tradition of the masters were only pseudo-classicists, working upon themes that had been worn threadbare and literary genres that were exhausted.

A reaction is already foreshadowed, the herald of new times. Minds surfeited with the meretricious charms of social life gave themselves up to a dreamy melancholy, the great lyrical theme of Rousseau gradually shook society to its very foundations, while the outer world made a more powerful appeal to the senses, and the picturesque found a more definite expression with Bernardin de Saint-Pierre. Men of erudition, moreover, historians and artists, revived ancient art, just as the *Pléiade*, two hundred years before, had revived ancient learning. Nor did this revival fail to find a poet of its own : André Chénier restored to literature a sense of art, thus contributing to bring about the literary renovation of the ensuing age.

1. The Philosophical Propaganda; the last of the "Encyclopédistes".
The Salons. — The *Mariage de Figaro*.

The spirit of the *Encyclopédie*, albeit somewhat tamed, still animates the "philosophers" of this period, Raynal, Volney. Condorcet, who no longer belong to literature proper. Mention should be made however of the work of Volney, *Les Ruines*

End of the Classical Era and Preparation of a new Art (1775-1785).

(1791), in which the naturalistic philosophy of the age, its irreligion, its faith in progress and hatred of tyranny are intermingled with picturesque details concerning the manners and customs of the East. It is also necessary to record the *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain*, because this work, written by **Condorcet** at the height of the Terror in a house where he lay in hiding, and published by his widow in 1795, is as it were the last will and testament of the *Encyclopédie*. The candid and chimerical optimism expressed therein, with perfect faith and trust in the power of reason, marks the very goal towards which had tended the undivided thought of the century.

So-called "philosophy" found a home in the salons of Mme d'Épinay, Mme Necker, Mme Suard, frequented by the witty "causeurs" of whom the most famous were Chamfort and Rivarol. **Chamfort** (1741-1794) is best known to us by his *Maximes*, of a trenchant and humorous turn of expression, from which on more than one occasion Schopenhauer derived his inspiration. After wasting his life in self-indulgence, this worldling fairly soon became a man-hater, then a revolutionist. **Rivarol** (1753-1801), on the contrary, whose literary reputation was made by his *Discours sur l'universalité de la langue française*, awarded a prize by the Berlin Academy (1784), opposed the revolution in the *Journal politique national* and the *Actes des Apôtres*.

By the salons, by books, in polite circles and among the people themselves, the diffusion of the new ideas proceeded with marvellous power in French society. A peculiar exaltation of political liberalism pervaded even the most aristocratic gatherings. Letters written by ladies of the highest nobility breathe the hatred of despotism, nay, almost of royalty. One production of this period, a comedy, combines and concentrates all the good and evil sentiments developed by the philosophers, allowing them to burst forth in an explosion of witty mirth and satirical verve: joy of living, thirst of enjoyment, intense intellectual excitement, contemptuous hatred of the present, of abuses, of traditions, longing for a new life in the moral, political and social spheres. And the name of this comedy is *Le Mariage de Figaro*.

2. Beaumarchais.

Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais (1733-1799), was born in Paris and began by learning the trade of his father, watch-maker to the king. He entered into relations with the financier Paris-Duverney who took him into partnership, in connection with certain schemes; at the death of that partner he had a lawsuit with the heir, and having lost his case held up the judges to ridicule in four *Mémoires* (1774-1775), which are a masterpiece of pamphleteering. This satire was in conformity

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with the public feeling excited against the "Parlement Maupeou". Beaumarchais at once leapt into celebrity.

Two earlier productions of his, *Eugénie* (1767) and *Les Deux Amis* (1770), had met with scant success. The *Barbier de Séville* (1775), somewhat coldly received as first written, in five acts, soon proved highly successful when reduced to four. It was only after several years and many fruitless attempts that he succeeded in having the *Mariage de Figaro* represented in 1784. In consequence of all the talk that had preceded its appearance, the play was a huge success: it ran to no fewer than one hundred performances.

The character of Figaro, who in the *Barbier de Séville* was but a merry rascal, the insolent and unprincipled heir of Renart, Pathelin and Panurge, is here transformed into a discontented man, embittered against a society that has not granted him a place proportionate to his merits. The famous monologue in the fifth act constitutes a ruthless indictment by which Beaumarchais gained the applause of the society of his age for the very ideas that were soon to bring about own its destruction.



BEAUMARCHAIS

After Cochin's portrait, engraved by Saint-Aubin (1773).

Beaumarchais is one of the most characteristic figures of the 18th century, and himself the original of his hero. A master of intrigue and bold in business, unscrupulous withal, as to the means he employed, he travelled all over Europe in the performance of secret missions, the object of which was to put an end to the publication of injurious pamphlets levelled at Louis XV, or Marie-Antoinette. At the time of the war of Independence, he undertook, with the approval and assistance of the French Ministry, to provide the American "Insurgents" with arms, in respect of which the United States remained very considerably in his debt. Mixed up with contracts for the supply of arms during the Revolutionary period, he eventually sought refuge in Hambourg,

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where he found himself reduced to abject poverty. On his return to Paris he achieved a further success with his tearful drama, *La Mère coupable* (1792), a sequel to his two previous plays, completing the trilogy. We are here shown Figaro as an old man, and the Countess a prey to remorse. The play did not outlive the passing fashion that gave it birth : Beaumarchais remains for posterity the author of the *Barbier de Séville* and the *Mariage de Figaro*. These two masterpieces of the comedy of manners, particularly the latter, are most ingeniously constructed. By his dramatic skill, his trenchant style, the bold flippancy of his witticisms, his tendency to make of the stage a mouthpiece for the propagation of his ideas, Beaumarchais foreshadows the greatest dramatic writers of the 19th century : he is the true precursor of modern comedy.

3. The Pseudo-Classical Writers and the signs of the coming New Art : Bernardin de Saint-Pierre.

In every kind of production, whether lyrical, didactic or dramatic, the line of the would-be classics is continued, but there remains no trace of poetry whatever in the work of all these rhymsters : Lebrun, Thomas, Dorat, Parny, La Harpe, de Belloy, Saurin. True poetry is stifled in an atmosphere of abstraction created around it by the philosophical rationalism of the age. In order to differentiate verse from prose, recourse is had to figures of rhetoric, to conventional modes of expression, to periphrases, to the so-called " elevated " style. Descriptive poetry — as in the *Saisons* (1769) by **Saint-Lambert**, the *Mois* (1779) by **Roucher**, the *Jardins* (1782) by **Delille**, — appeals, not to the imagination, but to the intelligence : it is suggestive of the idea rather than of the object itself. Delille describes all manner of things, down to the most insignificant : games of chess, shooting and fishing parties, even the game of skittles. Descriptions thus conducted are a mere play of the mind, a problem to be worked out, a riddle. As to the verses themselves, all that is required of them is that they shall be made up of the proper number of syllables and shall conform with the rules of prosody.

Among all these writers of tragedies, there is but one deserving of mention, **Ducis** (1733-1816), who attempted to adapt Shakespearean dramas, but merely cast them in the worn-out mould of Voltaire's tragedies : *Hamlet* (1769), *Roméo et Juliette* (1772), *Le Roi Lear* (1783), *Macbeth* (1784), *Jean sans Terre* (1791), *Othello* (1792). The language, moreover, though metrical, is trite, prosaic and artificial, exhibiting all the defects of the age.

Yet on closer inspection we already discern the signs of a coming transformation, destined to restore polite letters to their place among the arts. A gradual awakening of the senses is felt through-

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out this literature, which had become exclusively intellectual. Diderot throws down the barrier that separated it from painting and architecture. Men of letters mix freely with painters, sculptors and architects. The influence of English literature — lyrical, picturesque and sentimental — accentuates the new characteristics in process of development in French literature.

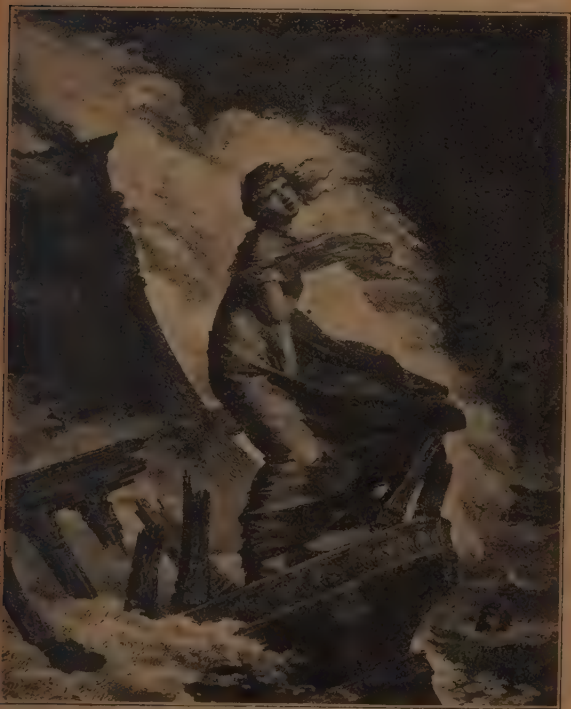


PORTRAIT OF BERNARDIN DE SAINT-PIERRE
Engraving by Ribault, after Lafitte (1805).

New tendencies are revealed in the very depths of society. Weary of the pursuit of worldly pleasures, it gives itself up to revery and melancholy. Mme du Defand's correspondence, highly significant in this respect, reveals to us first her incurable "ennui," then an evolution from critical aridity to an exalted sensitiveness. Mlle de Lespinasse, for all she was the muse of the *Encyclopédie* and of the militant philosophers, shows a passionate soul, a morbidly exalted imagination, a romantic sentiment, whereby she closely resembles J.-J. Rousseau. At this time, also, a young girl of sixteen, Marie-Jeanne Philippon, who was later on Mme Roland and perished on the Revolutionary scaffold, wrote to a friend,

Mlle Cannet (May 9th 1774): "Alexander sighed for new worlds to conquer; I would fain have them on account of the souls." This outburst of sensibility was verily the prelude to the Romanticism that was to follow. But in order that the new literature should blossom forth, it was necessary that the old society, with its spirit, its manners, taste and style, should have become a thing of the past.

Already a few new characters make their presence felt. From 1741 to 1777 were published successively translations of Richardson (*Pamela*, 1741; *Clarissa Harlowe*, 1750; *Grandison*, 1754); Thomson (*Les Saisons*, 1760); Shakespeare (1759); Young (*Les Nuits*, 1769); Ossian (1777). The latter aroused genuine enthus-



VIRGINIA IN THE SHIPWRECK

Illustration by P.-P. Prud'hon for the library edition of "*Paul et Virginie*", by B. de Saint-Pierre (1806).

The ship that carried Virginia was wrecked under the eyes of Paul and the young girl perished in spite of Paul's efforts to save her.

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iasm by the airy poetry of the scenery, the melancholy charm of moorland wastes, with their driving clouds and mists, the lament of the waves and wind, and the quaint moonlit setting in which the spirits of the dead loom up among the graves. All these influences acquired their full force when they encountered favourable surroundings.

Meanwhile the picturesque made its appearance with **Bernardin de Saint-Pierre** (1737-1814). A disciple of J.-J. Rousseau, and a poor philosopher in spite of his pretensions, his originality lies in his sensibility, but above all in his talent as a colourist, a talent exemplified in his *Etudes de la nature* (1784). Of an adventurous and undisciplined turn of mind, he attempted several walks of life, went abroad, served as a civil engineer in Russia, had some thoughts of raising a model city on the banks of Lake Aral, and subsequently spent three years in Reunion Island. On his return from the latter, he settled in Paris and made the acquaintance of Rousseau, whom he accompanied in his walks.

Bernardin de Saint-Pierre has left us a celebrated novel, *Paul et Virginie* (1787), which was both a delicate pastoral and a revelation of exotic conditions. The unbounded success enjoyed by this production is a sign of the times: the blissful innocence of two children, brought up far from civilisation and the contact of society, the charm of wild nature, affording welcome relief from the over-refinement of thought and manners, created a deep impression, alike poetical and picturesque. Once again poetry was restored to its place in literature, with its attendant ideal of art and beauty.

4. The Revival of Antiquity : André Chénier.

This aesthetic revival, like that of the 16th century, was chiefly due to a return to Antiquity.

As far back as the 17th century the study of Greek had been neglected in most of the schools. Latin was indeed cultivated, but in accordance with the methods and spirit of the humanists, who appreciated the great writers of Rome for the quality of their diction, or for the universal bearing of their ideas, to the entire exclusion of art.

The learned Benedictine monks, however, had by no means given up the study of ancient monuments — architectural works, fragments of paintings, statues, vases, and all manner of archaeological remains — and their mantle had fallen upon the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, which preserved the genuine sense and exact knowledge of ancient Greece and Rome. The **Comte de Caylus**, after his travels in Italy and the Near-East, had published in 1752-1767 his *Recueil d'antiquités égyptiennes*,

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étrusques, grecques, romaines et gauloises, in 7 quarto volumes, affording a more faithful delineation of ancient life. His *Tableaux d'Homère et de Virgile* provided the artists of the age with a number of ancient subjects. The Abbé **Barthélemy** embodied, in his *Voyage du jeune Anacharsis* (1788), all the knowledge of contemporary science as regards Greek civilisation : public and private life, religion and philosophy, monuments and natural scenery. By this means the cultivated portion of the public were able gradually to acquire a more precise and as it were a concrete vision of the ancient world. This new trend of thought is exemplified in André Chénier.

André Chénier (1762-1794) was born in Constantinople of a Greek mother. When but sixteen years of age, as a pupil at the Collège de Navarre, in Paris, he tried his hand at poetry, deriving his art from the ancients : among the papers he left behind him have been found imitations of Homer and Virgil. His sense of art thus led the youthful poet to imitate Antiquity, while imitation in its turn developed and refined his sense of art.

Nor did he expect anything further from such imitation. His *Bucoliques* call up all the themes and figures dear to the Greek artist's fancy, to the sculptor's chisel, to the divine language of the poet, and above all Youth and Love, the two chief deities of pagan life.

Chénier's poetry shows the influence of his age and recalls in some ways the libertine poets of the 18th century, such as Dorat, Bertin, or Parny. Not that this was by any means the best part of his work, though there are some delightful verses to be



ANDRÉ CHÉNIER
Engraving by *Henriquel-Dupont*, after *J.-B. Sueve's* portrait.

This portrait was painted in the prison of Saint-Lazare, on Messidor 29 of the year 2 (1794), a few days before the execution of the poet.

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found in his amatory *Elégies*. The most pleasing, however, are those in which, reverting to the ancient models and rejuvenating art at the Greek sources, he revives the grace of the *Anthologie* and calls to mind Ronsard. Almost every detail of his *Bucoliques* and his *Idylles* is borrowed from ancient Greek poetry, but there is in this imitation such restrained elegance, so refined a sense of beauty, that it may be said to be thoroughly French.

These sketches, which are now essentially representative of Chénier's writings, were for him perhaps — nay, most likely — mere “ studies ”: exercises, and preparatory work. We learn from his poem *L'Invention*, his notes and sundry rough drafts that his aims were indeed lofty.

After restoring to classical poetry, which had become entirely abstract and intellectual, the living forms of beauty, Chénier cherished the fond hope of imposing them upon the thought of his age. It was then that he proclaimed the famous precept : “ *Sur des penses nouveaux faisons des vers antiques* ” — let us embody new thoughts in verse redolent of Antiquity. At this time also he conceived the design of his great philosophical poems *l'Hermès* and *l'Amérique*.

The *Hermès* was to have been no less than a history of nature and of man, with a picture of civilisation in its different stages and various aspects : mythological and religious, scientific, philosophical and artistic. Chénier realised the fact that the 18th century had been devoid of poetry ; he longed to be the poet of that philosophical age. The problem then was to take the substance of the *Encyclopédie* and to animate it with poetic inspiration. It is indeed open to question whether the attempt was possible of realisation. Certain it is that Chénier did not have time to carry it through and that the little he achieved of his great design leaves us in doubt as to its eventual success.

The Revolution made of Chénier a political writer and a journalist, or rather it made of him a great citizen, a champion of liberty and order, in defence of which he put forth all his talent and courage. Arrested under the Terror, on March 7th, 1794, he was imprisoned at Saint-Lazare, transferred to the Conciergerie on the sixth of Thermidor, judged and executed on the 7th, forty-eight hours before the fall of Robespierre, which would have saved him. He had always been something of a satirist. On the eve of his death, resentment prompted him to write those immortal verses, the *Iambes*, expressive of the indignation of a lofty soul, overflowing with faith, enthusiasm and generosity, in presence of the crimes committed in the name of liberty.

Cut off at the early age of thirty-two, Chénier left writings of an amazing diversity. Truth to say, he never did anything but try his skill. We cannot tell how his poetry would have developed. What has come down to us is more like a gallery of mutilated fragments, some of which have all the grace of ancient reliefs.

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One thing is certain, that he was a poet, in an age when more or less ingenious versification had taken the place of poetry.

Some of Chénier's poems were published after his death in various collections; but it was only in 1819 that the Latouche edition revealed to France the poet she had lost. While, as



THE LAST CART-LOAD

This lithograph, the title of which is not absolutely correct, the work of the celebrated artist Raffet (1835), represents André Chénier being conveyed to the scaffold on Thermidor 8, 1794.

regards the composition of his workss Chénier is connected with the 18th century, he belongs to the 19th in respect of their influence.



Photo Braun et Cie.

THE TRIUMPH OF THE FIRST CONSUL, By P.-P. Prud'hon (*Chantilly Museum*).

This allegory, like the literature of the revolutionary period its inspiration from ancient Roman sources. Before the triumphant Consul is seen a symbolical figure of Poetry, celebrating his victories.

XXI

THE REVOLUTION AND THE EMPIRE (1789-1815).

The Contemporary era may be dated from the French Revolution. The social transformation was attended by the transformation of ideas, sentiments, manners and taste. Not that the results were immediately made manifest. In literature as in history, the Revolution and the Empire were a period apart, a period of transition marked by a literary production as poor in quality as it was abundant, struggling painfully along the paths followed by the preceding period, even while a new era is ushered in with Mme de Stael and especially with Chateaubriand, two isolated geniuses whose decisive influence, held in check by the Empire, took effect but twenty years later — when it brought about the advent of Romanticism.

1. The Pseudo-Classical School.

It may appear surprising at first sight that a period so rich

historically as that of the Revolution and the Empire should — with the two exceptions referred to above — be so poor from a literary point of view, and blighted by a barren spirit of imitation. On closer inspection, this apparent anomaly is accounted for by the fact that at the close of the 18th century the old literary "genres" were worked out: the classical spirit stood in need of renovation. But the Revolution diverted all the live forces of the nation from literature to politics, while effecting such an upheaval of society that the new spirit was incapacitated from bearing immediate fruit in the field of art and thought. Under the Empire, on the other hand, the despotism of the censorship, Napoleon's tyrannical favouritism, the absorption of the people's energies in warlike or administrative pursuits, all concurred in impoverishing literature.

Tragedy was still in favour, with **Marie-Joseph Chénier** (1764-1811, a younger brother of André Chénier), **Arnault**, **Ducis**, **Népomucène Lemercier**, **Gabriel Legouvé**, **Raynouard**, and **Luce de Lancival**. Special mention should be made of a play called *Tippo-Saib* (1813), in which we are surprised to find not the slightest trace of local colour, knowing as we do that the author, **Etienne de Jouy**, had seen service in India as an officer, and of **Brifaut's**, *Ninus II*, where it would be still more surprising to find that element, considering that the play was originally called *Don Sanche* and its scene laid in Spain. As France was then at war with the latter country, the Spanish name was done away with and the play became an Assyrian tragedy.

Comedy — leaving aside the topical plays which were produced under the Revolution, and are now of interest only for the history of manners — was represented by a number of fairly pleasing works by **Andrieux** (*Les Etourdis*, 1787; *Le trésor*, 1804; *Molière avec ses amis ou la Soirée d'Auteuil*, 1804), **Fabre d'Eglantine** (*Le Philinte de Molière*, 1791), **Collin d'Harleville** (*L'Optimiste*, 1788; *Le Vieux Célibataire*, 1792), **Picard** (*La Petite Ville*, 1801; *Les Ricochets*, 1807), and **Etienne** (*Les Deux Gendres*, 1810).

There were still some epic writers, such as **Luce de Lancival**, whose *Achille à Scyros* is a poor imitation of Homer; **Baour-Lormian**, with *L'Atlantide*; **Creusé de Lesser**, who was better inspired in pointing the way to the admirers of the old medieval epics in his *Chevaliers de la Table Ronde* (1812), *Amadis* (1813), *Roland* (1814), though, truth to say, the fifty thousand verses written by him are terribly prosaic.

Baour-Lormian is entitled also to a place among the elegiac poets for his *Poésies ossianiques* (1801), translated or adapted from Macpherson, whose influence on contemporary taste and subsequent writers was so great. **Fontanes**, **Chénédollé**, **Millevoye**, wrote some lyrical poems in a strain foreshadowing Lamartine.

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Descriptive poets arose on every side. The leader of the band was **Jacques Delille** (1738-1813), who published successively *Les Jardins* (1782); *L'Homme des Champs* (1800); *L'Imagination* (1806); *Les trois Règnes de la Nature* (1809); *La Conversation* (1812).

The critics, too, continue the 18th century tradition with **Suard**, a former contributor to the *Encyclopédie*, and the editor of the *Publiciste* down to 1810; **La Harpe**, whose public lectures, delivered from 1786 to 1798, were published under the title of *Le Lycée* (9 vols., 1799). A spirit of greater independence is now manifested in the newspapers, notably in the *Journal des Débats*, founded in 1789, in the columns of which Geoffroy, for fourteen years the writer of the *feuilleton*, issued severe judgments upon the dramatic productions of the Empire, renovated the criticism of the stock plays and contributed to discredit the pseudo-classical tragedy.

At this time, also, **Joubert** (1754-1821), an original and acute thinker, wrote his *Pensées* and *Correspondance*, which were not published, however, before 1842.

In all this production there is not one masterpiece to be found, nor would it be worth mentioning, did we aim merely at giving a methodical inventory of the literary works deserving to be known. But if we wish to explain the sequence and evolution of French literature, it becomes necessary to allude to the works that exhibit the decay of the old "genres", or herald the advent of the new, while showing us that the latter are not the product of some sort of "spontaneous generation". We shall have occasion to call attention to this question later on, when dealing with the origins of the Romantic drama.

Meanwhile, two names tower prominently above this whole period: Mme de Staël and Chateaubriand.

2. Mme de Staël.

Brought up among the "philosophers" who frequented her mother's salon, Germaine Necker, daughter of the Minister of Louis XVI, became baronne **de Staël** (1766-1817) by her marriage. She was thoroughly imbued with the spirit of the 18th century at its close. The philanthropy and sentimentality that were then in fashion are to be found underlying her first work of importance: *De l'Influence des passions sur le bonheur des individus et des nations* (1796), together with the same longing for happiness as is revealed in the two novels wherein she has depicted her own self: *Delphine* (1802) and *Corinne* (1807). Mme de Staël is a staunch believer in progress, though she is by no means exempt

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from that melancholy known some few years later as "the dis-temper of the age" — that species of mental anguish induced by a feeling of moral solitude, of the soul's emptiness, and an unsatisfied yearning for the infinite.

Thereby she is already a precursor of the Romantic school, whose advent she prepares. But the work that exercised the great-



CORINNA AT CAPE MISENUM, by F. Gerard.

The artist has given the features of Madame de Stael to the heroine of the novel "Corinne" in a scene taken from the romance.

est influence was her book *De l'Allemagne* (1810). It is divided into four parts: the first is entitled *De l'Allemagne et des mœurs des Allemands*; the second, *De la littérature et des arts*; in the third she studies *La philosophie et la morale*; in the fourth, *La religion et l'enthousiasme*. The second part is the most interesting. In Germany, Mme de Stael acquired the perception of Romanticism and poetry. To her the Romantic school was indebted

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for its main characteristics : the breaking away from the classical tradition, a spirit of individualism and the sense of religion.

Her writings are very rich in ideas, but of small artistic value. She writes in a style befitting a spirited, often somewhat diffuse, but always interesting conversation. As regards the history of literature, her work is chiefly of interest because the whole theory of Romanticism is to be found in it. It set people thinking.

3. Chateaubriand.

This writer, on the contrary, is a very great artist, who delights the imagination. He it was that introduced into literature the principal features of Romanticism.

François-René vicomte de Chateaubriand (1768-1848) was the tenth child of a younger branch of an old Breton family. After receiving a somewhat desultory education, he spent two years of his life in the dreary solitude of the Château de Combourg, with no other confidant than his sister Lucile, an overstrung, dreamy nature. He had just obtained a commission as second lieutenant and been presented at Court when the Revolution broke out. He left for



Photo Hachette.

CHATEAUBRIAND

After F. Durel's statue (Versailles Museum).

America at the beginning of April 1791 and remained there for about seven months. He visited Niagara Falls, sailed down the Ohio to its confluence with the Kentucky River, possibly proceeding down the Mississippi as far as Florida. A recent critic, M. Joseph Bédier, controverts Chateaubriand's claim to

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such extensive travel, alleging that he could not have had sufficient time for it, and reproaches him with having availed himself of descriptions given by other travellers. On receiving the news of the flight of Louis XVI, Chateaubriand returned to Europe and



THE CHATEAU OF COMBOURG

After an engraving executed in the life-time of Chateaubriand and probably under his eyes.

Chateaubriand, at the age of sixteen, passed two years in this chateau alone with his father and his sister Lucile. He has left a celebrated account of this period in his "*Memoires d'Outre-tombe*" (*Memoirs from beyond the Grave*).

joined the army of the *émigrés*. He was wounded in action, and crossed over to England, where he encountered a period of destitution and hunger. In London he published his *Essai sur les Révolutions* (1757), in which we find him still conforming to the 18th century tradition and not yet in possession of the idea with which his name is connected. On his return to France in 1800, he became the foremost initiator of the literature of the 19th century, and above all he stirred the souls of men to their depths.

A notable change had been effected. In his *Génie du Christianisme* he reacted against the irreligiousness of the 18th century and against the "philosophers" who scoffed at Christianity as being a barbarous, absurd and ridiculous system. His position was that religion is beautiful and worthy of respect, the very fount

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and origin of all progress in the modern world. A new art of poetry was thus evolved, consisting primarily in breaking away from the traditions of the Classical art, in reinstating the Middle Ages, Gothic art, the national history, in classing the Bible among the literary masterpieces of mankind, in rejecting mythology, in quickening the sense of nature and opening up once more the wells of emotion.

While setting forth the beauties of Christianity and reviving the religious sentiment, Chateaubriand gave magnificent expression to that spirit of melancholy which was presently called the "distemper of the age". In his novel *René* (1805), he has given us a picture of himself and of his age, of an age when unsatisfied souls were tormented by vague aspirations, by unreasoning fits of sadness, by the undefinable uneasiness following upon the great upheaval that had shaken society to its very foundations. This little book met with a marvellous success and gave birth to a disquieting progeny. Among the works written under its inspiration, mention should be made of one of the masterpieces of the psychological novel, *Adolphe* (1816), in which the author, Benjamin Constant, turning upon himself his formidable power of analysis, has traced the slow but sure process of disorganisation effected by love in a heart incapable of loving.

Not satisfied with stirring the souls of men to their depths by awakening in them the powerful emotions of the religious sentiment and romantic melancholy, Chateaubriand renovated the sense of art by associating art with life as it presents itself in the diversity of time and place, or in other words, as it is revealed to us by History and Nature. These are the two sources from which his fancy derives its strength and life : historical truth and exotism. Chateaubriand restores to literature the sense of local colour both in time and in space. By his short novel *Atala* (1801), an episode detached, like *René*, from the *Génie du Christianisme* and published separately a few months earlier, and by his great prose epic, *Les Martyrs* (1809), Chateaubriand renovated history, criticism and the novel. His other books, the *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem* (1811), *Les Natchez* (1825), *Les Aventures du dernier Abencérage* (1826), the *Etudes historiques* (1831), the *Voyage en Amérique* (1834), do but reinforce this action. His *Mémoires d'outre tombe* (1848), to which he devoted the remaining thirty-seven years of his life, are a vast autobiography, in which the author gives an account of his childhood, of his travels, of his political life, depicts natural scenery and paints portraits, in short, reveals his complete self. They constitute as it were a synthesis of the various elements of his genius and have assumed with the lapse of time, the foremost place in his life's work.

4. The Style of the Empire.

The imitation of ancient art, at first so fresh and charming with André Chénier, assumed a very different complexion during the period of the Empire. The French classical culture had, for



Photo Hachette.

THE FUNERAL OF ATALA, by Girodet in 1808 (Louvre Museum).

Chaatas, with the aid of a hermit, lays Atala in her tomb after her voluntary death.

two centuries, been far more Latin than Greek, in fact almost exclusively Latin. Napoleon's imagination, moreover, was visibly dominated by the memories of the Roman Empire, even as his policy was dominated by the idea of organisation and order for which Rome stands so essentially in the ancient civilisation.

Under the Emperor, therefore, the arts preferred the Roman majesty to the graceful monuments of Greece : the architects Fontaine and Percier erected the triumphal arch of the Carrousel

after the model of the arch of Titus, and the Colonne Vendôme after the model of Trajan's column. They transformed the furniture of the Imperial residences after the same fashion. The painter David (1748-1825), who had been entrusted during the Revolution with the direction, nay the dictatorship of artistic productions, became Napoleon's foremost painter. Accustomed to Roman scenes (*Le Serment des Horaces*, 1785; *L'Enlèvement des Sabines*, 1799), he treated the *Couronnement de Napoleon* in the same way. It was he, moreover, who under the immediate personal control of the Emperor designed the costumes and the pageant of the Coronation. The painter Girodet, who derives his inspiration rather from the art of Greece, merely borrowed from the perfection of his models a somewhat frigid artistic ideal (*Le Sommeil d'Endymion*, *Les Funérailles d'Atala*). The same taste, the same style pervade, the prose and the verses of Fontanes, a correct and elegant writer who was, so to speak, the official literary author of the Empire and the high master of the Imperial University. The style of the Empire — a form of pseudo-classicism — is to be found both in Mme de Stael and in Chateaubriand. Mme de Stael, in her celebrated novel, *Corinne*, presents Corinne in the garb of Greece, wearing antique cameos in her hair and accompanying her songs on the lyre. Similarly does Chateaubriand, in *Les Martyrs*, depict Cymodocée; and Atala herself, reclining among the flowers in the paleness of death, remind us of a statue carved by Canova.

The birth of Romanticism was undoubtedly retarded for some years by the favour extended to the style of the Empire.

XXII

THE ROMANTIC POETS (1820-1850)

1. Romanticism : its Definition and Characteristics.

What is Romanticism precisely ?

In the very middle of the 18th century, at that splendid period when the sources of poetry seemed indeed to have run dry, Diderot once exclaimed : " When shall we see poets appear ?... It will be after an age of disaster and grievous misfortunes, when the harassed nations begin to breathe again. Then shall men's fancy, shaken by fearful sights, depict objects unknown to those who have not seen them with their own eyes. " These prophetic words give an exact definition of the psychological circumstances in which Romanticism first saw the light of day.

The term itself assumed diverse meanings in proportion as the idea expressed by it underwent certain changes. The first is

that which we find in Mme de Staël. To the literature of the Ancients, which among the Moderns is a transplanted literature, she opposes the Romantic or knightly literature, born on the soil of the Moderns, of their religion and their institutions. This amounts to opposing the Romantic to the Classical. The Classical literature claimed its connection with Antiquity; the Romantic literature, with the Middle Ages. The former had become a literature of imitation; the latter presents itself as a national literature. Now the influence of the Ancients was soon replaced by that of the Moderns, Romanticism claims to be swayed by foreign influences: that of Shakespeare, Ossian, Walter Scott, in England; Goethe, Lessing, Schiller and Burger, in Germany; Dante in Italy; Lope de Vega and Calderon, in Spain. The idea expressed by the term Romanticism thus becomes complicated and

confused. Yet a third element is presently introduced: melancholy, the "distemper of the age"; and, more generally, all the sentiments, all the passions awakened in souls stirred to their depths by a mighty upheaval.

What stands out most clearly, when we come to study the origins of Romanticism and attempt to define it, is that it first



FRONTISPICE TO LAMARTINE'S "*Harmonies poétiques et religieuses*",
in the Brussels edition of 1830.

This illustration is highly symbolic of the idea that the "Romanticists" entertained of the consolations of poetry.

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became conscious of its own nature when it opposed itself to the classical, or rather to the pseudo-classical school which it combated and was soon to replace. This is why it appeals, either concurrently or by turns, to the Middle Ages, to Christianity and to the Moderns ; why it breaks away from the traditional rules of the classical art of poetry — e. g. the arbitrary distinction of the several “genres” — and at last proclaims absolute liberty to be the very principle of art. Such being the case, all its characteristics, so diverse, nay contradictory in appearance, are fully explained and summed up a fundamental element to which all may be reduced : individualism. The sum and substance of Romanticism is neither more nor less than the triumph of personal inspiration, aiming at freeing itself from an exhausted tradition and worn out formulæ.

This transformation is evidently connected with the great social transformation that marked the advent of a new era. For two centuries the most illustrious writers had laboured exclusively for the purpose of giving pleasure to polite society, to the aristocracy. Now the Revolution suspended social intercourse in France, thus removing literature from the influence which from 1610 to 1789 had been its prime mover. The writer suddenly found himself left to himself, to his own sentiments, to the natural bent of his mind : hence the personal, individualistic character assumed by literature during the Romantic period. All the rest is of secondary importance and may be accounted for by movements of reaction against anything that obstructed that individualism, by the efforts made with a view to satisfying it, and by an unconscious or deliberate choice of the best means to bring about its realisation. This will appear more and more clearly as we review the chief manifestations of Romanticism.

2. Lamartine.

It was in lyrical poetry that Romanticism found its most original and most perfect expression. But the Romantic lyricism presents certain characteristics that are peculiar to it. Its subject matter consists in the emotions, in sentiments and dreams : joy and grief, hope and fear, faith and doubt, liberty and patriotism. It resorts to the deepest wells of inspiration : nature, love and death. Yet the poet is interested in these general themes only in so far as his personal emotions reveal to him their full wealth and depth. The Romantic lyricism is, on the whole, but the subjective expression of the eternal sentiments of mankind.

Alphonse de Lamartine (1790-1869) did not devote himself more particularly to a literary career. A diplomatist, a deputy, Foreign minister and chief of the provisional government when the Revolution of 1848 overthrew King Louis-Philippe, he

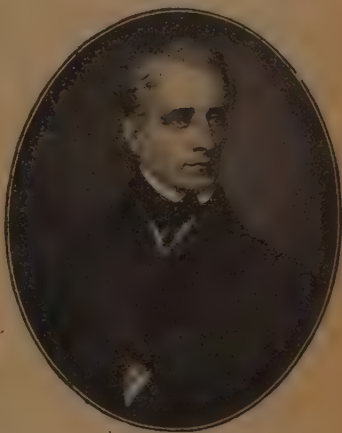
The Romantic Poets (1820-1850).

published between the ages of thirty and fifty a number of verses in which is naturally exhaled the inspiration of perhaps the most poetic soul that ever existed. He is an idealist, who gives poetic expression to the most lofty sentiments : faith in God, love, hope and serene trust and confidence, perfect communion with Nature. His *Méditations poétiques* (1820) satisfied both the taste and the requirements of the public. Lamartine speaks to us of himself : he expresses the anguish and the hopes of a soul that finds peace in nature and in God. The *Nouvelles Méditations* (1823), the *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses* (1829), the *Recueils poétiques* (1839), are further, though less novel and felicitous products of the same inspiration.

As early as 1824, in the *Mort de Socrate*, in which he expounded the theories of the Platonic spiritualism, Lamartine had attempted the loftier philosophical poetry: *Jocelyn* (1836), which he presents as a "diary found in a country vicarage", is an "episode" detached from a vast epic, which the poet had intended to devote to the history of Mankind and to treat in a succession of tableaux dealing with the various ages. This metrical love novel contains admirable descriptions and passages of the most beautiful lyricism.

La Chute d'un Ange, another fragment of the same epic, would no doubt have been the first episode, just as *Jocelyn* is the last. This story of an angel enamoured of a daughter of Eve, and cherishing the wish to become a man in order to draw nearer to the woman he loved, takes us back to the earliest ages of the world, prior to all history.

Lamartine's poetry is tuneful rather than picturesque; he is not



ALPHONSE DE LAMARTINE.

After a miniature preserved at the Château de Saint-Point, which was the property of the poet.

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a descriptive poet and he looks upon the setting merely as the framework for his sentiments. But his verses are an enchanting music, and he is possessed of a power of oratory which imparts a majestic rhythm to the noble ten line stanza.

All his writings in prose — the *Voyage en Orient* (1835), the *Histoire des Girondins* (1847), which created a sensation and contributed to prepare the Revolution of 1848; *Confidences* (1849); *Geneviève* (1851); *Le Tailleur de Pierres de Saint-Point* (1851); *Graziella* (1852), the most touching and the most popular of these short novels — denote a lyrical poet, as does his whole life. His last years were troubled by the straitened circumstances in which he found himself as the result of his prodigality and lack of foresight. To pay off his debts and earn a living, he bound himself down to the most strenuous labour, hastily writing a whole mass of prose compositions — among others, the *Cours familier de littérature*, which contains some very fine pages. After acquiring glory in its every shape, Lamartine died practically in oblivion; but posterity has reinstated him in the front rank of his contemporaries.

3. Alfred de Vigny.

Alfred de Vigny (1797-1863) published but one collection of verse, *Poèmes antiques et modernes*, enlarged and modified in four successive editions (1822-1829). It is divided into three parts: *Le Livre mystique*, *Le Livre antique*, *Le Livre moderne*. After 1840 he produced at rare intervals a few philosophical poems, collected after his death under the title of *Les Destinées* (1864). In this book are to be found his masterpieces, which are equalled, however, by one of the poems of the former collection: *Moïse*.

De Vigny is a philosophical poet, and his philosophy is pessimism — a pessimism vastly different from the vague melancholy of the Romanticists and the gloom engendered in them by their personal sufferings: it is bound up with a comprehensive view of the universe. Life is an evil in that every object of our desire is but a cause of suffering for us; all men stand morally alone, the superior man more so than the rest (*Moïse*). Love is but deceit (*La Colère de Samson*), Nature is indifferent or hostile to man (*La Maison du Berger*). God turns a deaf ear to our cries, or at least vouchsafes no answer to our appeals (*Le Mont des Oliviers*). Our intelligence strives in vain to understand life, to understand the world (*Journal d'un poète*): the poet is driven at last to wonder if his work is anything more than the toil of a prisoner, matting straw in his jail.

Yet the pessimism of de Vigny leads him neither to discouragement nor to cowardice. In that "moral solitude", which is man's great affliction, he should brace himself up, and accept his destiny in proud and uncomplaining silence (*La Mort du Loup*).

He must carry out his allotted task, commiserate the distress of his fellow-men, labour at promoting the reign of the mind. This philosopher-poet, who had despaired of everything at one moment, ends up by asserting the lofty mission of poets and thinkers (*La Bouteille à la mer : L'Esprit pur*). Each of his poems, it will be seen, is a symbol expressive of some deep thought. The genius of the writer does not reside in a wealth of verbal invention. De Vigny wrote little, and his poetic production especially is anything but abundant. Yet at times the fullness of his thought, or the power of his sentiment, imparts supreme beauty to his form, and then de Vigny writes some of the most beautiful verses in the French language, the most restrained, the purest and the most pregnant with meaning.

We will refer later on to his novels and plays, when dealing with the influence of Romanticism on these two styles of production. But it is not superfluous to note even here to what a degree de Vigny remains a poet and a

Romanticist in his prose writings as well. In his own judgment *Cinq Mars*, *Stello*, *Servitude et Grandeur militaire* are "the cantos of a species of epic poem upon Disillusionment", the hero of which is by turns gentleman, poet and soldier — in other words Vigny himself, under the three aspects in which he was fond of depicting himself, and which indeed constitute his complete personality.



ALFRED DE VIGNY IN 1832

After a lithograph portrait by Maurin.

4. Victor Hugo.

Victor Hugo (1802-1885) is above all things a poet, nor did he ever cease to write verses. He soars up by degrees from the *Odes et Ballades* (1822) to the *Orientales* (1829) and to the



VICTOR HUGO AT TWENTY-EIGHT
After A. Deveria's lithograph (1829).

splendid series of his four great lyrical collections: *Feuilles d'Automne* (1831), *Chants du Crépuscule* (1831), *Voix intérieures* (1837), *Les Rayons et les Ombres* (1840). His originality asserts itself more and more fully, reaching its full development in *Châtiments* (1853), *Contemplations* (1856) and the *Légende des Siècles* (1859). The son of a general of the First Empire, he was granted a pension by Louis XVIII after publishing the *Odes*, became a Peer of France under Louis Philippe, a Deputy for Paris in 1848 and was exiled after the "Coup d'Etat" of December 2nd 1851. During the whole of the Second Empire he lived in Belgium, then in Jersey and Guernesey, returning to France after

the fall of Napoleon III (1870). He had the glory of symbolising in his own person the poetry of his age (1). His prolific old age made of him a sort of patriarch of French literature, just as the "patriarch of Ferney" had been, a century before his time. France granted him a national funeral and a huge crowd accompanied his remains to the Panthéon.

Whereas Lamartine's lyricism consisted entirely in the spon-

(1) Victor Hugo thus belongs by his writings to both the great literary periods into which the 19th century is divided.

taneous expression of the inmost feelings : love, melancholy and hope, with which was intermingled the sentiment of nature, Victor Hugo voiced successively all the impressions of his age. He has orchestrated, as it were, in poems that have all the wealth of symphonies, every lyrical theme upon which inspiration can work freely : God, patriotism, the family, Nature, love and death, liberty and progress, the vexing problem of the Unknown. One of his collections bears the title of *Toute la lyre*, a designation eminently suitable to his work as a whole.

And the form is even richer than the subject matter. In the entire range of French literature there is no greater virtuoso than he. Victor Hugo came into the inheritance of all the great poets who had preceded him, and added to it not a little besides. Overleaping the classics, he took up the tradition of the poets of the Renaissance and even went back to the troubadours and trou-

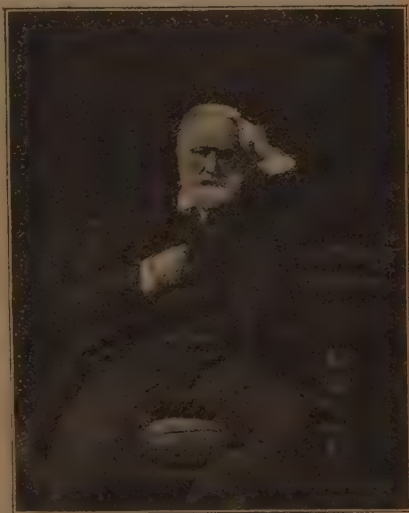


Photo Hachette

VICTOR HUGO IN HIS LAST YEARS

After the portrait painted by Bonnat (Victor Hugo Museum).

vères, whose inventions and resources he assimilated. Finally, to all this ancient wealth he added freely from the store laid up by the precursors of the Romantic school, welding all these various materials in the fires of his forge, in that workshop wherein his indefatigable industry never ceased, for over sixty years, to fashion with ever more perfect craftsmanship a magnificent production.

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After the three great collections that mark the height of his genius and virtuosity, his over-trained imagination sometimes becomes artificial; the versifier, through sheer excess of practice, abuses his mastery and seeks after effect to the point of lapsing into extravagance (*L'Art d'être grand'père*, 1877; the two further collections of the *Légende des Siècles*, 1877 and 1883; *Les Quatre Vents de l'Esprit*, 1881; *Religions et Religion: L'Ane: La Pitié suprême*, etc.).

Victor Hugo cultivated every branch of literature; we shall have occasion to speak of him again when dealing with the drama and with the novel.



ALFRED DE MUSSET, AT 27

After a medallion by David d'Angers (1831).

5. Alfred de Musset.

Born in Paris, where he also died, **Alfred de Musset** (1810-1857), when still quite young, frequented the Romantic circles, where he was received as the *enfant terrible* of Romanticism. With a sprightly and charming malice he parodied its abuses in his first poems: *Contes d'Espagne et d'Italie* (1830). Following upon these he composed the

Spectacle dans un fauteuil (1832), — containing a drama: *La Coupe et les Lèvres*, and a comedy: *A quoi rêvent les jeunes filles*; also a small poem or metrical tale, *Namouna*. All his verses at this period went to make up the collection entitled *Premières poésies* (1835). A painful incident in his private life, a great love betrayed, opened up the era of his masterpieces: *Ode à la Malibran*; *Les Nuits*; *Lettre à Lamartine*; *L'Espoir en Dieu*; *Le Souvenir*, etc., forming the collection of his *Poésies Nouvelles* (1835-1841). In these Musset equals the greatest poets in depth of feeling and purity of form. He transformed the lyrical elegy and voiced human suffering with a pathos through which is expressed his own philosophical creed: man attains to self-knowledge only in grief and suffering, when he realises that his shortlived happiness was as nothing, that memory

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will henceforth be the very life of his soul, his grief and his torment.

Throughout the poetical effusions of Musset are found a simplicity and easy-going naturalness that are not exempt from certain weaknesses, but constitute nevertheless their greatest charm and, in his best moments, their supreme beauty. At times he is somewhat careless, inaccurate and obscure. He bestows but little care upon composition. But in spite of all this, his poetry, when it does not aim too high, is a delightful causerie, fanciful and teeming with emotion, at once sentimental and picturesque, always infinitely supple and varied and delicately shaded. And when the poet gives vent to the distress that wrings his heart, his songs of despair become divinely beautiful.

His book of *Contes et Nouvelles* show us this great poet as a delightful writer of prose, as clear and spirited as the best writers of the 18th century, and connected by this side of his talent with the classical tradition. His plays are also in prose and are a markedly original part of his work. We shall refer to them when speaking of the Romantic drama.

XXIII

THE INFLUENCE OF ROMANTICISM ON THE VARIOUS "GENRES"

1. The Romantic Drama (1829-1843).

At about the same time as it asserted itself magnificently in lyrical poetry, Romanticism strove to become paramount on the stage. In his desire to set himself up as chief of a school, Victor Hugo expounded the theory of the Romantic drama in the *Preface to Cromwell* (1827), a noisy manifesto serving as introduction to a play utterly unfit for the stage. He completed that theory in the prefaces to his subsequent dramas. It is manifestly built up in opposition to the classical tragedy, advocating as it does the suppression of the famous "unities", and the intermingling of the different genres and styles. Not that there was anything particularly new in all this, after the attempts of the "tearful comedy" and the "bourgeois drama". But Romanticism goes a step farther: not content with abolishing the barriers that separated the various dramatic genres, it likewise overthrew those separating the dramatic compositions from the rest. From history it derives its picturesque element, from the epic its heroic and legendary inspiration, from lyrical poetry its sentimental ardour, its impassioned flights, its taste for images appealing to the sensibility and for symbols that expand the dreamy realms

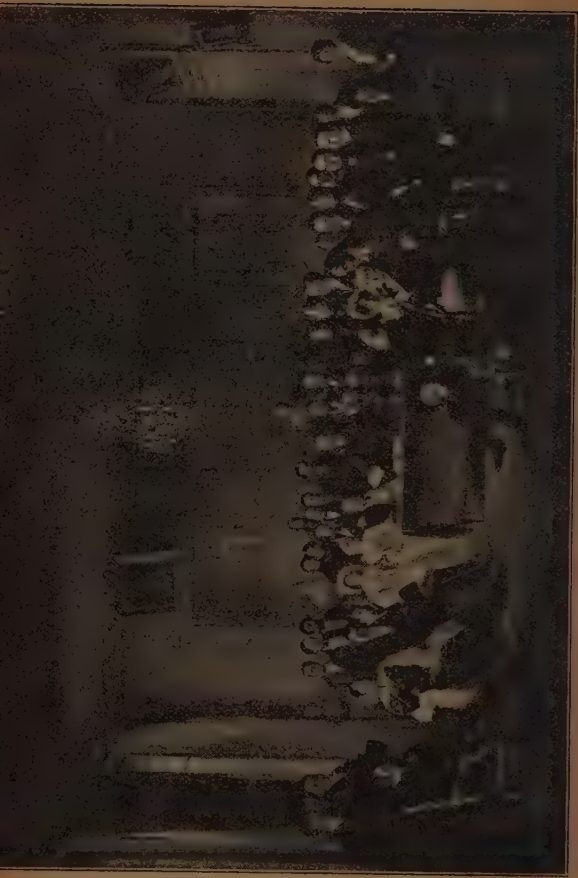


Photo Braun et Cie.

A READING IN THE GREEN-ROOM OF THE COMEDIE FRANÇAISE, by *François Joseph Heim* (*Versailles Museum*).
Mlle Mars, the celebrated actress, is the 5th personage from the left the 7th Emile Deschamps, the 16th Alfred de
Vigny the 18th Frédéric Soulié. The 1st personage from the right is Alexandre Dumas the 4th Victor Hugo the 5th

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of fancy. Theoretically, therefore, the Romantic drama is a synthesis embracing every shape of literary production, in that its aim is to embrace the whole field of life and thought "a comprehensive view of everything in its every aspect", says Victor Hugo in his *Préface to Marie Tudor*.

In point of fact the results were not — nor could they have been — proportionate to so vast an ambition : every writer conceived and realised the drama by his own means and in accordance with



LE BURG A LA CROIX (*Crucifix Castle*), a drawing by Victor Hugo.

Victor Hugo left a number of original and impressive drawings. The one here given which is due to the same source of inspiration as "*Les Burgraves*", is no doubt a reminiscence of a trip on the Rhine made in 1842.

his own genius, under the influence, moreover, of the conditions ruling the stage productions of the period. Two styles were then pre-eminently in favour : the melodrama and the historical tragedy, which provided the setting for the Romantic drama. They likewise supplied it with its two foremost interpreters : Frédéric Lemaître and Mme Dorval were both melodramatic actors. The dramas in prose written by Victor Hugo — *Lucrèce Borgia*, *Marie Tudor*, *Angelo* — are very little else than melodramas with high philosophical and historical pretensions. His metrical plays — *Hernani* (1830), *Marion de Lorme* (1831), *Ruy Blas* (1838), *Les Burgraves* (1843) — are redeemed by the poetry. Assuredly the characters are mere abstractions, utterly devoid

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of any psychological value ; the action is all too manifestly directed by the poet's will, with a view to picturesque or poetical effect. But within the limits of a dramatic frame, Victor Hugo has lavished all the resources of his marvellous lyricism. Situations and sentiments alike are but pretexts for the free display of his lyrical inspiration. For this reason, in spite of their obvious shortcomings as dramatic productions proper, Victor Hugo's best dramas remain worthy of the great poet he was.

The same cannot be said of **Alexander Dumas** the elder, (1803-1870) who was devoid precisely of literary genius. His earliest attempts were an historical drama in prose, *Henri III et sa Cour* (1829), which merely cuts up into so many acts and scenes a chronicle of the year 1578; *Christine* (1830) and *Charles VII chez ses grands vassaux* (1831), in verse ; but he very soon reverted to the melodrama with *Richard d'Arlington* (1831), *La Tour de Nesle* (1832), *Kean* (1836).

Between the time of the publication of the *Préface de Cromwell* and the first performance of *Hernani*, a translation into French verse by **Alfred de Vigny** of Shakespeare's *Othello* had been given at the Théâtre-Français under the title of *Le More de Venise* (Oct. 24, 1829). It was an admirably faithful translation as compared with the adaptations by Ducis. The public, who had extended an enthusiastic welcome to the English actors that came over in 1827-1828, showed a like appreciation of de Vigny's work, so much so that ten years later he boasted, in the introduction to the 1839 edition, that he had planted on the very citadel of classicism " the banner of art with Shakespeare's armorial bearings ", and thus opened the way for the Romantic plays.

After an historical drama, *La maréchale d'Ancre* (1831), in which he imitated Dumas, de Vigny wrote for the Théâtre-Français his play called *Chatterton* (1835), which may be set down as the most original production of the Romantic drama. The leading idea is that the poet is a missionary sent by God to be useful to mankind and to light its way, but for that very reason burdensome to his fellow-men, held in suspicion by authority and a victim of society, ever tardy in its recognition of genius and in supplying its wants. As soon as he becomes conscious of his tragic destiny, Chatterton takes his own life. Side by side with this " Romantic " and somewhat antiquated theme, there is a love drama of restrained and pathetic beauty: an unconscious, fatal love, fought down and conquered, that has gained a hold upon Chatterton and Kitty Bell, and finally unites in death two beings held apart by life. Whether Chatterton proclaims the noble character of his mission, or bemoans his poverty with sorrowful irony, his words are ever the expression of the Romantic lyricism. Yet there is a quality in this play that is not usually to be found in Romanticism : a sense of psychology. All the

figures surrounding the central character are drawn with precision and truth.

The comedies of **Musset** save and except the *Nuit Vénitienne* (1831), which met with no success, were not written for the stage. He published, in 1832, three poetical essays cast in a dramatic form : *Les Marrons du feu*, *La Coupe et les Lèvres*, *A quoi rêvent les jeunes filles*. From 1833 to 1837, Alfred de Musset published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* practically the whole of his *Drames, Comédies et Proverbes*, among which we would mention : *Les Caprices de Marianne* (1833), *On ne badine pas avec l'amour* (1834), *Il ne faut jurer de rien* (1836), *Un Caprice* (1837).

An actress who had just come back from St-Petersburg, Mme Allan, gave a performance at the Comédie-Française of *Un Caprice* (1847), in which she had been applauded in Russia. Nearly all the other plays followed.

Now these belonged to no well-defined genre. No tradition, no convention, no practical necessity restrict the actor's liberty. In the setting, the action, the characters, there is something unreal and dreamlike. But in this case the dream is merely a transposed vision of life, and the originality of Musset's dramas lies in the fact that an unerring psychological intuition qualifies his fancy. The dialogue is replete with wit and verve, the style is of classical purity, with matchless vivacity and graceful charm. The inspiration is essentially lyrical and Romantic; the hero of these plays is always the author himself, in the various conditions of sensibility he has experienced in his own person and which he is skilled in representing under the garb of very delicate, very complicated and very life-like characters (Fortunio, Valentin, Perdican, Fantasio, Lorenzaccio). The secondary characters, on the contrary, are sketched in with a few clear and accurate strokes, marked by the sense of artistic caricature (Dame Pluche, Blazius, Bridaine, the Prince de Mantoue, the podesta Claudio). There are also some delightful figures of girls, restless and ingenious. And over all hangs an atmosphere of poetry and enchantment.

2. The Novel.

Romanticism directs the novel into two main channels : the one towards history, the other towards lyricism. There is no doubt but that the influence of Walter Scott was preponderating as regards the development of the historical novel. The novels he had published between 1814 and 1826 had met with immense success and had originated an outburst of the " historical novel " throughout Europe. Romanticism with its enthusiasm for the Middle Ages and taste for the picturesque was eminently

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predisposed to fall under this influence. In 1826 **Alfred de Vigny** published *Cinq Mars ou une Conjuration sous Louis XIII* — a dramatic tale in which he alters history of a set purpose, and distorts the characters of the leading personages in the name of the rights of the poet as claimed by him in his introduction. In the three episodes of *Stello* (1832), history is called in merely



READING NOTRE-DAME DE PARIS, lithographe by Eugène Lami (1832).

A curious representation of a small literary circle of the Romantic period.

to supply examples bearing out the thesis we mentioned above in relation to the drama of *Chatterton*, viz. that the poet, or more generally the man of letters is bound to be misunderstood, whatever the political form of the community in which he strives to live : absolute monarchy, constitutional monarchy, or republic. The three examples, each of which is the subject of a short tale, are Gilbert, Chatterton and André Chénier. From the second of these episodes de Vigny, in 1835, drew the drama of which mention has already been made. *Souvenirs de Servitude et de Grandeur militaires*, his masterpiece in prose, likewise comprises three episodes : *Laurette ou le Cachet Rouge*, — *La Veillée de Vincennes*, *La Vie et la Mort du capitaine Renaud ou la Canne de*

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Jonc. In these de Vigny opposes to the painful obligations of military discipline the moral greatness of the soldier, compounded of self-devotion and the sense of honour. Like the poet, the soldier is a preordained victim in modern society. That is the central idea round which are grouped the main features of these three dramatic tales, embodying de Vigny's profound sadness, caused by that disharmony between man and his time that is one form of the "distemper of the age".

Victor Hugo, whose ambition it was to tread every avenue of literature, had very early tried his hand at the novel. *Hand'Islande* (1823), a youthful production of remarkably unequal merit, and *Bug-Jargal* (1825), the subject of which is the rebellion of the San Domingo negroes against France, are extravagant melodramas cast in the form of narratives in which the fantastic element predominates over the historical, the latter being reduced to glaring blotches of local colour. His *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1831) constitutes the great historical novel of the



ESMERALDA AND QUASIMODO

Illustration by Tony Johannot for the 1836 edition of
"Notre-Dame de Paris"

In this engraving the artist has strongly brought out Victor Hugo's fundamental artistic principle of antithesis: the contrast between light and shade, beauty and ugliness.

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Romantic school. Replete as it is with digressions and dissertations, it calls up nevertheless with a wonderful power of imagination and a matchless wealth of colour the Paris of the Middle Ages, teeming with life around its Gothic cathedral.

Les Misérables, begun before 1850 and published in 1862 is a vast and intricate work in which are to be discerned the humanitarian and social doctrines that inspired the Revolution of 1848. It does not proceed directly from Romanticism except by the expansive personality of the author, who pours into it all his ideas, emotions and sentiments, and depicts himself in his hero, the rebellious Marius.

The same tendency marks the one and only novel of Alfred de Musset, the *Confession d'un enfant du siècle* (1836), an unequal production, wherein genuine passion and empty declamation are intermingled, while it affords a painful analysis of the impotence of a discouraged heart.

This direction toward lyricism, imparted to the novel, may be said to date back to Chateaubriand's *René* (1805). It was clearly discernible also in *Obermann*, (1804), by **Sénancour**, that strange precursor who analysed with such keen penetration the torment of the human intelligence, just as Chateaubriand, opening the way for Romanticism, analysed the torment of human sensibility. Obermann's trouble — yet another form of the "distemper of the age" — is his incapacity to act, because life and its ends are alike incomprehensible. The only form of action he finds possible is literary activity, expended in describing that very incapacity.

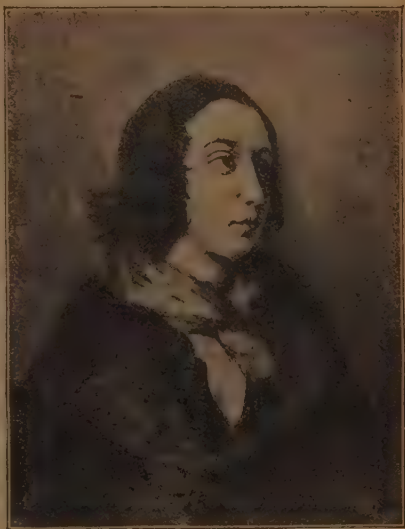
Benjamin Constant, in *Aldolphe* (1816), a short autobiography in the shape of a novel, analysed with unflinching precision the moral crisis induced by the slow disintegration, the starts and flutterings of a perishing love. By its wholly psychological conception, however, and the simplicity of its execution and its sobriety of form, this work really belongs to the classical tradition.

Fed upon Rousseau, deeply stirred by Romanticism, and stricken by the painful experience of her married life, **George Sand** proceeds to the extreme limits of Romanticism. In her earlier novels (*Indiana*, 1831; *Valentine*, 1836; *Lélia*, 1833; *Jacques*, 1834) she gave expression to lyrical Romanticism, that is to say, the expansion of an impassioned sensibility, renovating and transforming the heart. George Sand extols love and censures society, whereby love is oppressed. The same inspiration pervades *Mauprat* (1837), in which love is seen to master and refine a wild nature. The lyrical theme subsists, but it is developed in a setting borrowed from the 18th century.

In a second portion of her prolific career, George Sand, under the influence of the theoreticians of 1848, rallied to the sensitive and almost mystical socialism of that time: she gave birth to a social, humaniatrian novel, sketching out the dream of a golden age

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wherein the fusion of the various classes would be brought about by love : *Le Compagnon du Tour de France* (1840); *Consuelo* (1842); *Le meunier d'Angibault* (1845); *Le Pêché de Monsieur Antoine* (1847); *La Mare au diable* (1846); *La Petite Fadette* (1848); *François le Champi* (1850), are pure idylls, in which the actual objects she had before her eyes — her own countryside of Berry, with its peasants and landscapes — are presented with an art skilled in combining truth with poetry. Finally, during the last period of her life, she delighted in telling beautiful tales of the past or of the present : *Les Beaux Messieurs de Bois-Doré* (1858); *Jean de la Roche* (1860); *Le Marquis de Villemer* (1861).



PORTRAIT OF GEORGE SAND

By Eugène Delacroix (Mme Landouzy's collection).

Gifted with an imagination that assumed all manner of shapes, with a facility thanks to which literary creation was for her the easiest thing in the world, George Sand, with her easy, fluent style, in turns picturesque and poetical, wrote more than one hundred volumes of novels, tales, memoirs, reminiscences, impressions, travels, plays and epistles, which place her in the front rank of her great contemporaries.

It was next to impossible for Romanticism to gain a lasting hold over the novel, which by its very nature is a preeminently

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objective style of composition. Nor was it long before the poetical flights, the utopism, the false local colouring, the lyrical or extravagant psychology of the Romantic novel were ousted by the deliberate simplicity, minute exactness and scientific pessimism of the Realistic novel. We have already referred to Benjamin Constant's *Adolphe* as belonging to this class, though it was quite an exception, a case standing by itself. At the very height of the Romantic outburst, however, the realistic novel was



/ HENRI BEYLE (STENDHAL)

After a medallion by David d'Angers (1829).

the 18th century. He was a materialist and an atheist, persuaded that the sole guiding motive of our activity is the pursuit of happiness. He is a worshipper of energy and beauty. Napoleon was his hero, Italy his chosen land. An observing and penetrating mind where man is concerned, his realism is entirely psychological. His chief concern is to discover and note down the secret motives determining our acts, and he grasps the shades thereof with an unerring discrimination which excites the admiration of the philosophers. He thus substituted for the Romantic subjectivity and individualism the objectivity and impersonality of the artist. After publishing various books of travels and criticism : *Rome, Naples et Florence* (1814), *Histoire de la peinture en Italie* (1817), *Racine et Shakespeare*

about to develop with Stendhal, Balzac and Mérimée. Now while these three writers remain Romantic by certain traits characteristic of their age — Stendhal's peculiar fondness for original characters presented in bold relief, Balzac's magnifying and frequently melodramatic imagination, the picturesque exoticism of Mérimée — none the less does their literary genius develop in a direction diametrically opposed to Romanticism and make them imitators or precursors of the realistic school.

Stendhal, whose real name was **Henry Beyle** (1783-1842) inherited the spirit of

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(1824), *Promenades dans Rome* (1829), he produced in 1831 the first of his novels : *Le Rouge et le Noir*, *Chronique de 1830*. The minute analysis of the characters carried out in a style of remarkable firmness and precision, ironical and cruel in its cold impassiveness, constitutes the whole merit of this novel, the action of which is rather incoherent. *La Chartreuse de Parme* (1839) is the picture of a small Italian Court in 1815.

Stendhal once wrote : " I shall be understood towards 1880. "

He realised indeed how little notice would be taken, in the midst of the exaltations of Romanticism, of his shrewd psychology, his dry and somewhat frigid irony. Yet he himself did not realise how truly he had spoken. His celebrity, the worship of his admirers and the "stendhalism" or "beylism" they attempted to set up as a literary religion, date precisely from the time he had foreseen. Stendhal's action was twofold : by his power of analysis he prepared the revival of the psychological novel ; by the importance he gives to the temperament, to the influence of the surroundings, and by his negation of free will, he contributed to prepare the realistic or naturalistic novel.

Prosper Mérimée (1803-1870) is likewise distinguished, at the height of the Romantic period, by his concise precision and by his realism. He himself acknowledges how deeply he felt the influence of Stendhal, with whom indeed he has many points in common : he is, like Stendhal, trenchant, ironical, fond of banter and mystification. Like him he is an admirer of violent and brutal energy. Following upon an historical novel after the style of de Vigny, the *Chronique du règne de Charles IX* (1829), he published a series of tales, the most famous of which



Photo Ch. Peigné.

HONORÉ DE BALZAC

After a sepia drawing by Boulanger (Tours Museum).

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are : *L'Enlèvement de la redoute*, *La Venus d'Ille*, *Matteo Falcone*, *Colomba* (1840), the story of a Corsican vendetta and his masterpiece, and *Carmen* (1847). In the narrow setting of a short narrative, his impersonal art contrives to enclose the painting of the surroundings, the clear and strictly defined indication of the

characters, thus presenting finished models of precision of style and accuracy of colouring.

Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850) began by writing ludicrous novels of adventure. He then set up as a printer, was compelled to sell his stock in trade in 1827, and started working as many as eighteen hours a day to pay off his debts. In the space of twenty years, this undaunted and tremendous toil produced the *Comédie Humaine*, divided into several categories — "Scenes of private life": *La Femme de trente ans*, *Le Colonel Chabert* — "Scenes of provincial life": *Eugénie Grandet*, *Le Lys dans la vallée* — "Scenes of Parisian life": *Le Père Goriot*, *Grandeur et décadence de César Billaud*, *La Cousine Bette*, *Le Cousin Pons* — "Scenes of political life": *Une ténébreuse affaire*, *Le Député d'Arcis* — "Scenes



GOBSECK

Illustration taken from the Furne edition of the works of Balzac (1842).

Gobseck is one of the tribe of usurers to whom Balzac in his novels gives such vivid existence:

of military life": *Les Chouans* — "Scenes of rustic life": *Le Médecin de campagne*, *Le Curé de village*, *Les Paysans* — "Philosophical studies" — "Analytical studies". Although these tales are not episodes of one and the same story, Balzac frequently introduces the same characters, many of whom are "types" invested with wonderful truth and an extraordinary intensity of life. Resembling in this respect those great "creators of souls", Molière, and Shakespeare, Balzac attaches but slight importance to the plot and is chiefly concerned with

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bringing about the situations necessary for the successive working out of his characters in their every aspect. He is eminently successful in depicting human beings deformed by their particular craft, disfigured by folly or vice. But his favourite study is the abnormal development of some faculty or passion, to the detriment of the equipoise of the individual. His principal characters are thus monsters, so to speak, and it is perhaps on account of this deformation, as well as by his power of imagination, that Balzac belongs to the Romantic school. His novels are intricate and frequently make arduous reading, on account of their endless descriptions. His style, burdened with details, brings home to us the very reality of things and that is wherein he excels, apart from of the social, moral and literary dissertations in which he delights and sometimes gets entangled.

For the stage Balzac wrote a few plays that met with a chilly reception. The best of these is *Mercadet ou le-faiseur* (1851), in which he reverts to the subject of Lesage's *Turcaret*.

3. History.

During this period, history most certainly came under the influence of Romanticism, or at least of the same causes that produced Romanticism: the quickening of the imagination, a sense of the picturesque and of local colour. Chateaubriand, Mme de Staël and Walter Scott exerted a deep influence on Augustin Thierry, de Barante and Michelet.

Augustin Thierry (1795-1856) himself confessed that first *Les Martyrs* and then Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* had revealed the Franks and the Saxons to him, as well as his own vocation as a historian. He started his literary career as a journalist of the opposition and advanced, as an argument for showing a liberal spirit in politics, the theory of racial struggles for mastery, the enduring antagonism between the conquering race and the conquered. That theory he applies in his *Histoire de la conquête de l'Angleterre par les Normands* (1823) and his *Récits des temps mérovingiens* (1823-1840). What constitutes the literary value of these productions is the fact that the narrative is both simple and dramatic, yet precise. They are full of life and colour, without ever transgressing the limits of moderation. Augustin Thierry is an artist whose imagination is restrained and held in check by a scrupulous regard for accuracy and truth.

De Barante (1782-1866) is content with epitomising in an exact and spirited recital the old chronicles from which he derives his *Histoire des Ducs de Bourgogne* (1826). He himself has thus written a new chronicle, most interesting to read.

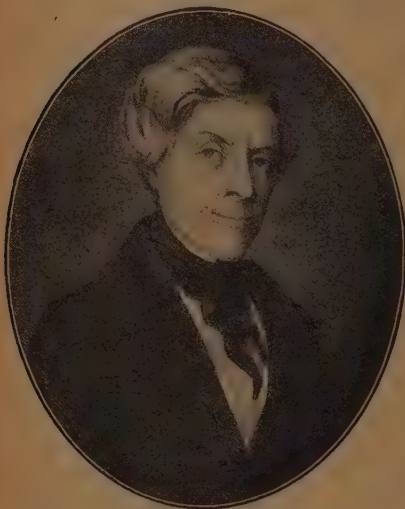
Michelet (1798-1874) after a laborious youth rose to be Keeper of the "Archives" historiques and a Professor at the "Collège

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de France". In the first few volumes of his *Histoire de France* (1833-1846), relating to the Middle Ages, his qualities as a scholar and a poet are harmoniously balanced. Very soon, however, he was seized with the fever of political strife. As early as 1840 he yielded himself up to extreme views and it was under the sway of this exaltation that. Suspending his narrative at this point

of the end of the Middle Ages, he approached the study of the Revolutionary period. His scientific qualities were thenceforth relegated to the background: he began to substitute his own ideas and sentiments for his former clear vision of the facts. Subsequently he returned to period he had temporarily abandoned: *Rennaissance et Temps modernes* (1855-1867).

The volumes dealing with the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries are written in an increasingly partial spirit, which led him, among other things, wilfully to disregard the true greatness of the



MICHELET, after a lithograph by T. Toullion (1843).

French 17th century. The seven volumes of his *Histoire de la Révolution* are written in this biased and impassioned strain.

Under the influence of the political events — the Revolution of 1848, which intensified his republican and democratic leanings; the Second Empire, which deprived him of his chair — he became still more prejudiced, to the detriment of his qualities as a historian, his work assuming a markedly partisan character.

According to Michelet, History is an "integral resurrection of

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the past". His style exhibits all the virtues and at times all the defects of Romanticism. It is highly figurative, spirited and lyrical, with certain lapses into obscurity or exaggeration, and a feverish passion that renders it somewhat breathless. He was a great and powerful, though very unequal writer.

4. The Movement of Ideas : Theoricians and Polemical Writers.

Romanticism alone cannot be said to represent the entire intellectual activity, or the whole literary production of the so-called Romantic period. We have already seen that the novel, in the case of its foremost exponents, had developed quite apart from its influence. We shall now see that this influence affected the movement of ideas but very little, so far as it can be traced in the works of the theoricians, critics, orators and polemical writers of the period under consideration (1815-1848).

The great intellectual and social disturbance caused by the French Revolution, the violent alternations of public opinion and the instability of the forms of government that succeeded one another from 1789 to 1848 — the Republic, the Consulate and the Empire, the Restoration — gave birth in the earlier half of the 19th century to an extensive literature of ideas and doctrines reflecting a considerable proportion of French thought during that period.

We first have the adversaries of the Revolution, the theoretical upholders of "throne and altar", who labour to restore the principle of authority : Joseph de Maistre and Bonald.

Joseph-Marie, comte de Maistre (1754-1821), born in Savoy before the French conquest, was for fourteen



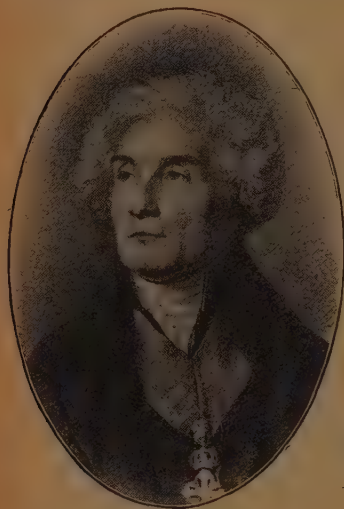
JOSEPH PRUDHOMME

After a drawing by Henri Monnier, author of "The Memoirs of Joseph Prudhomme".

Joseph Prudhomme is the typical middle-class man of the time of Louis-Philippe : commonplace, of limited outlook, full of narrow prejudices, a fond of pompons and inane phrases.

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years Minister Plenipotentiary of the King of Sardinia at Saint-Petersburg. His leading works were his *Considérations sur la France* (1796); his *Essai sur le principe générateur des constitutions politiques* (1810); *Du pape* (1819), and above all the *Soirées de St-Petersbourg* ou *Entretiens sur le gouvernement temporel de la Providence* (1821).



JOSEPH DE MAISTRE

After a pencil drawing by Vogel von Vogelstein.

his images, Joseph de Maistre is entitled to a place in the very front rank of French writers, among the followers of Pascal and Bossuet.

The work of the vicomte **de Bonald** (1754-1840), another keen upholder of the monarchical and religious principles, is of interest only as regards the history of ideas; properly speaking it does not belong to the history of Literature. He exerted a powerful influence on the counter-revolution. The two most important of his works, *Théorie du pouvoir politique et religieux*

All these writings might very well bear the subtitle of "Entretiens sur le gouvernement temporel de la Providence", for their common purpose is to demonstrate that nothing happens here below but by the Will of God. His aim was to dethrone the philosophy of the 18th century — "Voltaireanism" — and to re-establish religious authority under the sovereignty of the Pope, and political authority under the sovereignty of the King. He was the apostle of the counter-revolution. His ideas are expounded with an impassioned logic and frequently carried to the verge of paradox, as for instance by his glorification of war and his apology of the public executioner. By his close reasoning, aptness, vigour and precision of expression and the Biblical quality of

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dans la société civile (1796) and *Législation primitive* (1802) set forth a theocratic conception of society. The State is a big family, the chief of which is but the representative of God and the interpreter of the divine will. The individual has no right of his own; he must remain in the station assigned to him by authority. Joseph de Maistre realised the perfect agreement of de Bonald's doctrine with his own, and observed to him on one occasion: "All that I have thought, you have written; all that I have written, you have thought".

The chief exponents of the liberal doctrine were Paul-Louis Courier, Benjamin Constant and Lamennais.

Paul-Louis Courier (1772-1825) defended the opinions of the liberal party in a number of pamphlets which enjoyed great success at the time of the Restoration. A well-read scholar and a keen Hellenist, this "vine-dresser of Touraine", as he was fond of calling himself, wrote in a somewhat laboured, but firm and clear-cut style, with a spirit worthy of the best tradition of the 18th century.

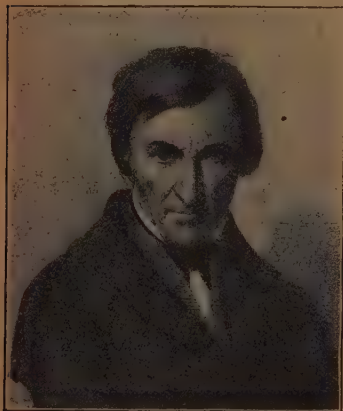
Henri-Benjamin Constant de Rebecque (1767-1830) was born in Lausanne, of a French family that had sought refuge in Switzerland after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. He held an important situation in the liberal party under the Restoration. The part he played may be studied in his *Discours à la Chambre des Députés* (1817-1830), and his ideas in two of his leading works: *Du gouvernement actuel de la France et de la nécessité de s'y rallier* (1796), and *De la religion considérée dans sa source, ses formes et ses développements* (1824-1830).

We have already mentioned his celebrated novel, *Adolphe*. A man of quite exceptional parts, he was endowed with a lucid and penetrating mind, spoiled to a great extent by an excessive scepticism which marred his life. Though something of a turn-coat in politics, he always stood up for the rights of the individual as against the State. His precise, vigorous and rather trenchant style entitles him to be called a good writer.

To this inconsistent, somewhat frigid and philosophical liberalism may be opposed the ardent and Romantic liberalism of **Félicité-Robert de Lamennais** (1782-1854), a Roman Catholic priest who left the Church to become a political orator. He exerted a great influence on the movement of ideas that led to the Revolution of 1848. His great work, *Essai sur l'indifférence en matière de religion* (1817-1821), is a violent attack upon the theism of the 18th century and on the Protestant creed. In 1830, he founded together with Lacordaire and Montalembert the journal *L'Avenir*, bearing the epigraph "Dieu et liberté". This sheet, defending the ideas of liberal Catholicism, was condemned by the Court of Rome and had to be discontinued, Lacordaire and Montalembert having promptly severed their connection with it. His *Paroles d'un croyant* (1834) brought about the final breach

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between Lamennais and the Catholic Church. From this time onwards, his writings, *Le Livre du peuple* (1837), *L'esquisse d'une philosophie* (1841), were devoted to the defence of the political and religious ideas for which he had been condemned. Like his countryman Chateaubriand, Lamennais was possessed of a brilliant fancy and a restless spirit. His dazzling style is sometimes bold to the point of excentricity.



PORTRAIT OF LAMENNAIS
engraved by Calamatta.

5. Criticism and Philosophy.

The progress of history is attended by the renovation of another style of composition: literary criticism. For a theoretical form of criticism judging every work in the light of a set doctrine and in accordance with a preconceived ideal, history substituted a study of literary productions considered in relation to the social condition of the age and the circumstances in which they saw the light of day. This is the novel position taken up by a brilliant professor, **Villemain** (1790-1867), who in his course of lectures at the Sorbonne (1816-1830) inaugurated historical and comparative criticism. According to Villemain, criticism is a delineation of history, nor did he fail to produce some very remarkable sketches in his *Tableau de la littérature française au XVIII^e siècle* et *Tableau de la littérature au moyen âge en France, en Italie en Espagne et en Angleterre* (1840-1844), in which he attempts to explain the works under consideration by taking into account the country where they were written and its civilisation, its manners and its ideas.

Augustin Thierry gives him credit for having created, by the combination of criticism and history, a new science which accounts for the character of the man and of his work and the reciprocal influence of the age and of the writer, thus raising literary history to the full dignity of social history.

Victor Cousin (1792-1867) taught philosophy at the Sorbonne, from 1815 to 1826, with signal success and formed a great number of disciples. A follower of Maine de Biran who had found in the primitive fact of consciousness — the *nisus* of the will — an escape from materialism, he attempted to establish a spiritualistic doctrine. His method was eclecticism, which aims at replacing all former systems by selecting in each the best elements it contains. But this very process of selection implies the application of a system. Eclecticism was beneficial in that it called attention to the various doctrines and thus gave a powerful impetus to the study of the history of philosophy.

To criticism and to philosophy may be referred the lectures delivered by **François Guizot** at the Sorbonne. The lessons instituted by him on December 7th 1820, and having as their subject the study of French institutions, soon developed into a regular course of political science, in which the professor strove to justify liberal ideas. The government of the Restoration was alarmed by these tendencies and Guizot had to suspend his lectures (1822). He resumed them however in 1828 and dealt with the study of French civilisation in a number of lessons which led to a revolution in the science of history. Following upon the events of July 1830, and the advent of the liberal monarchy of Louis-Philippe, Guizot was appointed ambassador, in London, then Minister of State, and was called upon to play a great part in politics. Even as a historian, he is first and foremost a statesman. His great concern is not so much to describe facts, as to point out their concatenation. He was the founder, in France, of political and social history (1).

The authoritative lessons of these great masters shed an incomparable lustre over the Sorbonne courses and their fruitful teaching, while exerting a great influence upon their hearers, fashioned disciples whose names we shall revert to when dealing with the second half of the 19th century.

XXIV

THE NATURALISTIC SCHOOL, (1850-1885).

1. The Movement of Ideas : Philosophy Criticism and History.

The latter half of the 19th century is characterised by a movement of reaction against Romanticism. This reaction was due in part to causes of a social order : the development of material

(1) A historian of the school of Guizot was **Alexis de Tocqueville** (1805-1859), who has left a very forcible study of the inner life of modern society in *La Démocratie en Amérique* (1835) and *L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution* (1856). The former is the best book ever written in France on the United States.

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interests, the growing importance imparted to political questions by the efforts made by the opposition, throughout the Second Empire, to restore the parliamentary regime, and after 1870 by party strife. But in this case as in all others the main cause was of an intellectual order : it was the progress of scientific positivism.

The positivism of which **Auguste Comte** (1798-1857) expounded the theory in his *Cours de philosophie positive* (1831-42) aims

at organising a science of humanity apart from any religious or metaphysical conception. After passing through the theological stage and the metaphysical stage, mankind has entered upon the scientific stage. Nothing can be real and "positive" except facts. We should observe nature, history and society. Ethics themselves must be a part of general science, because man has no law of his own, distinct from that of the world in general. He does not form an empire within an empire. His life must be governed by certain laws, which will constitute a code of "social physics".

Comte is not a writer, nor does his work belong properly speaking to literature. But his influence was exerted upon

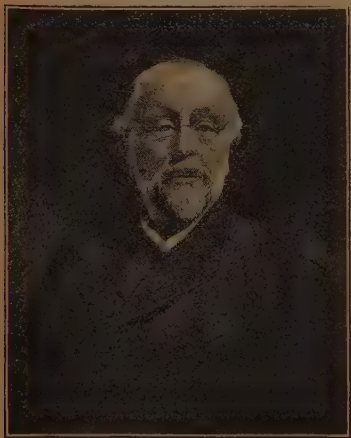


Photo Braun et Cie.

HIPPOLYTE TAINE

After a portrait painted by Léon Bonnat.

literature through the medium of the three foremost critics of this period : Sainte-Beuve, Taine and Renan, whose writings acted very powerfully upon literary creation.

Sainte-Beuve (1804-1869), in his *Portraits contemporains*, his *Causeries du lundi* (1857-1862), his *Port-Royal* (1866), and his *Nouveaux lundis* (1863-1872), deals primarily with individuals : he seeks in literary productions the expression, not of a society, but of a temperament. He claims to be a scientist and to compile "the natural history of the mind". As a matter of fact,

all he does is to give us spiritual biographies presenting the greatest interest, but devoid of scientific value for the simple reason that there is no such thing as a science of individual man; there can only be a science of man in general.

Hippolyte Taine (1828-1893) was the theorician of the "naturalistic" school. And he himself professes to be a naturalist, using the experimental method, connecting psychological with physiological facts, and finding on analysis, whether in the moral or in the physical universe, nothing but sensations and movements. Literature is determined by three main factors: the race, the surroundings (physical or historical) and the moment. "In this as in every other matter", he avers, "there is nothing but a problem of mechanics; the aggregate effect is a compound determined as a whole by the power and direction of the forces whereby it is produced."

His principal works, *La Fontaine et ses Fables* (1853), *Histoire de la littérature anglaise* (1863), *La philosophie de l'art* (1865-1869)—are applications of this doctrine. In his *Origines de la France contemporaine* (1875-1893), Taine applies his method to

history, which according to him, just like psychology, literature and art, may be reduced to a problem of mechanics. In history, as in any other branch of science, it is necessary in the first place to classify the facts, then to assemble them in groups, and from each of these groups to work back to the general character that determines them, and in itself explains everything. This systematising of facts is a highly dangerous process in the case of so complex a science, or rather a study, as that of history.



Photo Gershel.

ERNEST RENAN

After a photograph.

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Ernest Renan (1823-1892), in his two great works, *Histoire des origines du christianisme* (1863-1885), and *Histoire du peuple d'Israël* (1887-1891), attempted to apply the positivist method to religious studies. But in him erudition is blended with imagination and sensibility, as well as with a certain fondness for idealistic metaphysics, which has led him to diffuse throughout his writings his ideas concerning the universe and the future of mankind. He is one of the most captivating of French writers, by reason of an admixture of contradictory qualities that invests his work with a peculiar charm, as also on account of the extraordinary suppleness of his thought and style.

Art criticism is indebted to the painter **Eugène Fromentin** (1820-1876) for the most remarkable essay it has produced. In his *Maîtres d'autrefois* (1876), notes jotted down in the course of a journey in Belgium and Holland, the artist sets out with great shrewdness, after the method instituted by Taine, the general characteristics resulting from race, surroundings and moment. His penetrating insight enables him, however, to discern more particularly what distinguishes each several painter. By the study of craftsmanship and technique, he restores to criticism that element of individual originality which Taine did not sufficiently take into account.

The taste for truth that characterises this period was highly favourable to the development of History. Its chief exponent at this time was **Fustel de Coulanges** (1830-1889), whose method consists above all in a scrupulous analysis of the texts. He made a special study of the laws of transformation of societies: *La Cité antique* (1864), the most profound and complete attempt at explaining the ancient societies; *Histoire des institutions politiques de l'ancienne France* (1871-1889), to which he devoted the greater part of his life and which he did not have time to finish. His style is remarkable for the classical qualities of concision, sobriety and firmness. This great historian belongs to literature just as much as a Montesquieu himself.

After Fustel de Coulanges, we must further mention the valuable studies contributed to the history of Prussia by **Ernest Lavisse**: *Etude sur l'une des origines de la monarchie prussienne* (1875); *Etudes sur l'Allemagne impériale* (1887); *La Jeunesse du Grand Frédéric* (1891); **Albert Sorel**: *L'Europe et la Révolution française* (8 vol. 1885-1904); the works of **Albert Vandal** (1853-1910); the *Histoire de la Monarchie de Juillet*, by **Paul Thureau-Dangin** (3 vol. 1884-1897), an earnest and powerful work, of a somewhat austere loftiness of thought and gravity of style.

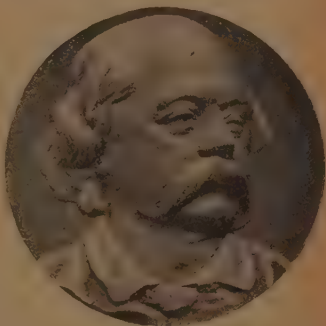
By the side of criticism and history, it behoves us, moreover, to mark out a place for political and literary journalism, which assumed exceptional importance during this period. Under

the Second Empire, the press enjoyed but a very moderate degree of freedom, and journalists were compelled to veil the boldness of their thought under the qualities of their style. **Louis Veuillot** (1813-1883), the ardent defender of Roman Catholicism (*Les Libres penseurs*, 1848; *Le parfum de Rome*, 1861; *Les Odeurs de Paris*, 1866); **Prévost-Paradol** (1829-1870), a scholar and humanist (*Essais de politique et de littérature*, 3 vol. 1859-1863; *Etudes sur les moralistes français*, 1865; *Quelques pages d'histoire contemporaines*, 4 vol. 1862-1866); **Edmond About** (1828-1885), another great scholar and a wit after the tradition of Voltaire; all these were the shining stars of journalism and remarkably fine writers.

2. The Novel.

During the second half of the 19th century the novel assumed a considerable extension and tended to absorb every other branch of literature, just as lyricism had done in the Romantic period. The realistic current was by far the most powerful and its originator and master was Gustave Flaubert.

Gustave Flaubert (1831-1880) belongs to the Romantic school by his literary admirations: Hugo, Chateaubriand; by his prejudices: hatred of the "bourgeois", of "bourgeois" life and ethics; by his taste for the bizarre and exotic; and above all by his artistic education, his sense of colour and form, his science of the manipulation of words, both as regards their meaning and imagery, his concern for perfection of execution, his scrupulous and learned technique. But he owed to the influence of his age, strengthened perhaps by heredity — for he was the son of a physician — a certain positive and scientific turn of mind, as well as his respect for exactness and objective truth. It was this combination of the qualities of Romanticism and Naturalism that cost him so much trouble to realise and that made of him a literary martyr; but it is also to this harmonious blending



GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

After a medallion by Chapu.

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of the two elements that he is indebted for the perfection of his work.

This comprises two groups of productions : his realistic studies of contemporary life — *Madame Bovary*, *L'Education sentimentale*, *Un cœur simple* — and his historical or legendary novels — *Salambô*, *La Légende de Saint-Julien l'Hospitalier*, *Hérodiade*, *La tentation de Saint-Antoine* — in which Flaubert applies to antiquity the methods of the modern novel, substituting for direct observation, impossible in these cases, the study of such documents as enabled him to reconstitute a reality long past and gone.

Madame Bovary (1857) is the masterpiece of Flaubert and of the French realistic novel. In this Flaubert has aimed at pointing out the danger of Romanticism, when carried into everyday life. Emma Bovary is a woman of exalted and dreamy sentimentality, married to a man of hopeless mediocrity; she considers herself to be a woman misunderstood, stoops to actual crime and eventually poisons herself. Flaubert has set this study in a framework of provincial manners and drawn figures of extraordinarily bold relief, notably the chemist Homais, who has become a traditional type of bourgeois anticlericalism and victorious stupidity.

Salambô (1862) is an archaeological historical novel, the setting of which is supplied by the Carthage of the Punic Wars. The plot is a very slight one, the love of Matho, the Lybian chieftain, for Salambô, the daughter of Hamilcar, serving merely as a pretext for the artistic reconstitution of Carthaginian life and the resurrection of an Eastern world possessed of the most dazzling colour. The same method of erudition placed at the service of art is applied with far less felicitousness and carried to excess in *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine* (1874) : before Saint Anthony, a motionless figure in the desert, files past a pageant of gods, animals and human beings, the whole universe in fact, with its mingled beauty and ugliness.

Flaubert, a highly conscientious artist, whose exclusive concern is the perfection of his work, always disclaimed any pretension at being set up as the chief of a school. The brothers **de Goncourt**, on the other hand, **Edmond** (1822-1896) and **Jules** (1830-1870), claim to have been the inventors of "Naturalism"; an exorbitant claim, if Naturalism, as it is our purpose to demonstrate in the present chapter, is indeed a general tendency of French literature in the second half of the 19th century, and is to be accounted for by no less general causes; but one fully justified if by Naturalism be meant the school that lays claim to that designation and the obnoxious literary doctrine it sets up. The Goncourts, who by their historical writings and artistic studies, brought the 18th century into fashion and exerted a further influence on the French taste by the introduction of Japanese art, did indeed bring into the novel (*Charles Demailly*,

The Naturalistic School (1850-1875).

1860; *Sœur Philomène*, 1861), the abuse of the "human document" in the shape of a sort of physiological and psychological newspaper reporting, pathology, and the distorted notion that the grosser the subject-matter, the greater the truth (*Germinie Lacerteux*, 1865).

They were the creators of the impressionist style, a tormented, complicated form of diction, but having the advantage at times of rendering certain very subtle shades of meaning.

Their best novel, perhaps, is *Renée Mauperin* (1864) in which they make a study of the artificial and over-refined soul of a girl belonging to high Parisian society.

If the Goncourts were admittedly the initiators of the Naturalistic school, **Emile Zola** (1840-1903) succeeded in becoming its chief. He propounded its doctrine in dogmatic and compelling formulas and embodied it in the most striking applications.

His theory of the experimental novel is derived from the literary positivism of Taine, who assimilates moral to physical phenomena and introduces the determinism of the natural sciences into psychology and literature. It appeals to the high scientific authority of Claude Bernard, whose *Introduction à la Médecine*



Photo Bazar.

EMILE ZOLA

After the portrait painted by Manet in 1868 and preserved by Mme Zola.

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expérimentale (1867), the most important scientific and philosophical work of the latter half of the 19th century, does indeed propound a method that is outside the actual scope of the book itself. According to Zola, the novel is an "experiment" similar to those conducted in the laboratory, and making it possible, therefore, to go back from the facts to the laws by which they are governed. This theory is based upon the strangest mis-conception, for it is by no means legitimate to assimilate an experiment scientifically conducted in a laboratory to the so-called experiments of the novel, which are carried out in the author's brain and are but more or less arbitrary hypotheses. The only portion of truth contained in the theory of the experimental novel is that there is a certain logic of the creative imagination, by virtue of which the determinism of causes and effects in individual and social psychology may be illustrated by art. It was Emile Zola's claim to have composed, in the Rougon-Macquart series, the "natural and social history of a family under the Second Empire". All the science and all the technique displayed in the work are of no value whatever, and the worst of the matter is that they usurp the place of psychology. The characters represent nothing more than a shallow physiology: they are lunatics or mere brutes. But if he was incapable of creating a life-like individual, Zola had the gift of moving the masses. The literary interest of his novels resides in the fact that they are vast allegories, intended to express some philosophical, scientific or social conception: the havoc caused by the abuse of spirits, the power of money, the life and bustle of the great stores, etc. By his vulgar and powerful talent, in which his imagination plays the preponderating part, Zola is a Romanticist. The best of his novels, *L'Assommoir* (1877), *Germinal* (1885), are those in which he has put a little more truth, a somewhat more precise and faithful observation than in the rest. The great weakness of Zola is that he mistook grossness for realism, that he invariably fastened upon the most ignoble instincts of human nature and polluted his writings with filth.

Far more truly a realist, **Alphonse Daudet** (1840-1897), with his exquisite sensibility, his lively and pungent wit, wrote masterpieces of observation and poetry. A Provencal by birth, he has admirably described Provence, and its sunny landscapes — *Lettres de mon Moulin* (1869); *Contes du lundi* (1873) — its human types from the whimsical Tartarin to the highly real Roumestan: *Tartarin de Tarascon* (1872), *Numa Roumestan* (1889). A bourgeois of slender means at the beginning of his career, he has depicted the strenuous life of those who fight for their livelihood the daily battle against poverty: *Le petit Chose* (1868), *Jack* (1862), *Froment jeune et Risler aîné* (1874). He also tried his hand at great historical studies of contemporary manners: *Le Nabab* (1877); *Les Rois en exil* (1879); *L'Immortel* (1888); and at

psychological analyses : *L'Évangéliste* (1883), a study of religious fanaticism, *Sapho* (1884).

Guy de Maupassant (1850-1893), Flaubert's godson, learnt from the latter how to follow up the original and peculiar character of things, and to choose the expression best fitted to throw light upon that character. He wrote a number of tales and novels

remarkable for precise observation and rigorous simplicity of style. His characters are taken from the circles which successively came under his experience : Normandy peasants (*Contes de la bécasse*, 1883); Norman or Parisian bourgeois of the humbler class (*Une Vie*, 1883; *Contes choisis*, 1886); the world of the public press and of politics (*Bel Ami*, 1885); then the social circles with their more delicate perception of things pertaining to the heart (*Pierre et Jean*, 1888; *Fort comme la Mort*, 1889; *Notre Cœur*, 1890). There is no better writer in the 19th century than Maupassant; by his intensity of vision, his power of delineation and the traditional quality of his style, he affords a consummate model of French prose. This perfect artist, who had never felt the need



Photo Nadar.

GUY DE MAUPASSANT

After a photograph.

of sympathetic expansion or the pangs of intellectual uneasiness, in the way of becoming a great novelist when he was cut off in his prime. Underlying the three novels he published when he was between thirty-eight and forty years of age his last works is to be discerned a sorrowful energy, a restrained emotion, a sense of the tragedy of human destinies, transcending the usual quality of his tales, which is somewhat summary and brutal.

Ferdinand Fabre (1827-1898) has left some vigorous studies

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of churchmen (*L'Abbé Tigrane*, 1873; *Barnabé*, 1875; *Mon oncle Célestin*, 1881); he has depicted with equal forcefulness and truth the Cévennes peasantry (*Les Courbezons*), just as **Emile Pouillon** has delineated the peasants of Languedoc and Gascony (*L'Innocent*, 1884; *Jean-de-Jeanne*, 1886; *les Antibel*, 1892). This very keen and penetrating sense of the harmonious relationship of man and his native soil, which constitutes the peculiar charm of the "romans de terroir", is likewise to be found in the novels and tales of **Anatole Le Braz** and **Charles le Goffic**, wherein are portrayed with such admirable truth and poetry the scenery and typical characters of their province of Brittany.

Though relegated to the background by the wealth and fecundity of the realistic or naturalistic novel, the ideal and Romantic tradition was not interrupted, but is continued in the works of Octave Feuillet and Victor Cherbuliez.

Octave Feuillet (1821-1890) depicts the manners, sentiments and customs of society: *Le Roman d'un jeune homme pauvre* (1858), *Histoire de Sybille* (1862); *Monsieur de Camors* (1867), *Julia de Tréceur* (1872). He was not content — as has too often been stated — with embodying a romantic dream in his novels, but has sketched in studies of passion, which remind us of Racine. He possesses in the highest degree the art of narrative and a clear and fluent style.

Victor Cherbuliez (1829-1899), of Swiss extraction, has infused into his somewhat high-flown novels his universal curiosity, his erudition and moral preoccupations: *Un cheval de Phidias* (1860); *Le Prince Vitale* (1864); *L'Idée de Jean Téterol* (1878). The most noteworthy passages are those giving the conversations of the various characters, and the remarks and comments which the author introduces so lavishly.

3. Poetry : Théophile Gautier, Le Parnasse

The poetry of this period likewise undergoes a transformation and follows the general movement of the literature of the age: it becomes more impersonal and less sentimental. The intelligence is restored to its proper place. This evolution is noticeable in the case of the great master of Romanticism himself. From 1850 onwards, Victor Hugo's poetry assumes a more objective character. **Victor de Laprade** (1812-1883), as much of a philosopher as of a poet, everywhere subordinates the emotion to the thought (*Psyché*, 1841; *Poèmes évangéliques*, 1852; *Idylles héroïques*, 1857; *Pernette*, 1868; *Poèmes civiques*, 1873; *Le Livre d'un père*, 1876).

Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), the translator of Edgar Poe, blends in his *Fleurs du Mal* (1857) an ardent idealism with a morbid sensuality. There is in his composition a good deal

of the Romantic spirit, together with a concern for the idea that is revealed by the solicitous quest of the symbol, and a striving after the perfection of form, attesting a passionate love of art.

But it is the work of **Théophile Gautier** (1811-1872) that marks the transition from the personal and subjective poetry of the Romantic school to the impersonal and objective poetry of the Parassians. His writings comprise not only verses, but novels and tales, accounts of travels in Spain, in Italy, and to Constantinople, studies of dramatic criticism and art criticism. The unity of his work, so diversified in appearance, lies in the fact that Gautier, who had been a painter in the first place, and who spoke of himself as "a man for whom the outer world exists", demands of poetry that it shall rival painting, sculpture and engraving as regards precision of outline, colour, relief and fulness of form. In this he was marvellously successful in his little collection *Emaux et Camées* (1852).

Théophile Gautier goes so far as to maintain that literature, and more especially poetry, may have a formal value, independent of the subject matter, that is to say of the ideas and sentiments it expresses.

This is the so-called theory of "art for art's sake", a mistaken theory which did not prevent Théophile Gautier from rendering useful service to poetry. He shook himself free from the constant display of the "ego" and the sentimental effusions so dear to the Romanticists. He bequeathed to his fellow writers a more scrupulous concern for craftsmanship, a taste for a more



THÉOPHILE GAUTIER
Caricature taken from the "Charivari"

Théophile Gautier affected in his manners, his costume and even in the cut of his hair, a most extravagant originality.

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precise form, thus preparing that transformation of lyrical poetry that is effected in the works of the new school.

It is easy to realise, moreover, that the age of passionate exaltations is at an end, when Romanticism is seen to terminate in the sparkling fancy of a **Théodore de Banville** (1823-1891). This captivating poet has no other conception of art but as a

wonderful skill in conjuring with metres and ringing the changes upon rhymes (*Les Cariatides*, 1842; *Les Stalactites*, 1846; *Les Odes funambulesques*, 1857). Banville is a pure artist, entitled to a very important place in the history of the technique of versification. In this respect, he also is a precursor of the "Parnassians".

What characterises the poets of this group — deriving their designation from the fact that the first collection of their verses, published in 1866, bore the title of *Le Parnasse contemporain* — is in the first place that the writer is at pains not to give expression to his personal emotions, and furthermore that he is highly solicitous of perfection of the form. His chief endeavour is to be an accomplished craftsman.



Photo Birou.

LECONTE DE LISLE
After a photograph.

The chief of the Parnassian school is **Leconte de Lisle** (1820-1894). In his *Poèmes antiques*, published in 1852, with a preface that is the programme of the new anti-Romantic poetry, and in his *Poèmes barbares* (1862), he turns away from "the public avowal of the heart's anguish", and strives to reconcile art and science in an inspiration derived from the history of mankind, thus sketching out before Victor Hugo a "legend of the centuries", wherein file past before us every form of worship and every creed, characterised with extraordinary precision (1).

(1) It is certain that Victor Hugo, observant as he was, and eager to conform

Not that Leconte de Lisle derives his inspiration from Antiquity alone. Reminiscences of his travels infuse into his lines an exotic element to which they are indebted for a number of sparkling landscapes and descriptions of animals, that are to be reckoned among the finest pieces of contemporary verse. Finally the compelling influences that have acted upon the poet's thought — scientific positivism, paganism and Buddhism — gave birth in him to a disenchanted sadness, a longing for annihilation, which impart a pathetic quality to some of his verses and thus invest them with a personal accent that redeems them from cold impassiveness. The form is admirable, both by the splendour of the image, and by the unerring precision of the word, the harmony and sonority of the versification, the richness of the rhyme.

By the side of Leconte de Lisle, the best of the Parnassian poets, united by one and the same solicitousness for precision and form, preserve their own originality.

Sully-Prudhomme (1839-1907), who prepared himself for writing poetry by the study of science, reverts to the personal style in his first collections of verses : *Stances et Poèmes* (1865), *Les Épreuves* (1866), *Les Solitudes* (1869), *Les Vaines tendresses* (1872), but displays a singular precision in the notation of the most subtle and accurate shades of feeling. Hence the deep and delicate charm of his poetry. Later on he endeavoured to broaden out his manner and to deal with loftier subjects in certain philosophical poems : *La justice* (1878), *Le Bonheur* (1888), containing fine passages, but marred to a certain extent by the sometimes infelicitous effort to translate into verse the conceptions of abstract thought.

François Coppée (1842-1908) is yet another poet who deals with " intimate " subjects, but his chief endeavour was to give expression to the poetry underlying the most uneventful lives and resulting from the most lowly and commonplace circumstances (*Le Reliquaire*, 1866; *Les Humbles*, 1872). For these familiar subjects, François Coppée preserves their natural setting : a humble dwelling, suburban scenery and popular aspects. A true child of Paris, he is by turns tender and witty, sentimental and given to malicious banter. His versification, perfectly adapted to the subjects treated, is somewhat akin to prose. He also wrote some tales in verse (*La Veillée* ; *La Bénédiction* ; *La Grève des Forgerons*) that enjoyed great success in their day, but already appear very old-fashioned, and some fine dramas, likewise in verse, and conforming with the Romantic system : *Severo Terelli* (1883), *Les Jacobins* (1885), *Pour la Couronne* (1895).

José-Maria de Hérédia (1842-1905) composed at leisure, as a

with the evolution of his age, was impressed by the *Poèmes antiques* and their preface, and that the influence of these was operative in the conception, as well as in the execution, of the *Légende des Siècles*, produced seven years later

labour of love, in the course of some thirty years, the admirable sonnets composing the collection of the *Trophées* (1893). Each of these sonnets is a perfect poem, both as regards the loftiness of the subject and their beauty of execution. In these the art of the Parnassians reaches its highest expression.

4. The Theatre

The dramatic style that predominates after 1850 is the comedy of manners. It is originally derived from the theories of Diderot and the early attempts of the initiators of the "drame bourgeois" and the "comédie larmoyante": Mercier, Nivelle de la Chaussée and Sedaine. But it borrows from the Romantic drama the combination of the genres and the description of the environment; from the plays of Scribe, the art of skilfully working out a plot and developing it in conformity with the peculiar logic of the theatre; from the novel, the qualities of observation and analysis therein exhibited by Stendhal and Balzac.

Thus constituted, the comedy of manners is concerned on the one hand with delineating "social man", or in other words with exhibiting the deformations produced in the character of man by social conditions (comedy of observation), and on the other with examining how the latter might be modified (plays with a purpose). This accounts for the influence exerted by the theatre during this period, in which two names stand out in bold relief: Alexandre Dumas the younger, and Emile Augier.

Alexandre Dumas (1824-1896), son of the Romantic dramatist and popular novelist, was both a very keen-sighted observer and an almost mystical reformer, who thoroughly believed in the social mission of the stage and practised his art as an apostolate. He attacked with equal boldness and vigour everything he deemed of a nature to threaten society with decomposition: the hollowness of Romantic passion and the idle dreams of misunderstood women after the style of Emma Bovary; marriages in which the question of money is paramount; the love of luxury in the woman; the misconduct of the man. He began by publishing in 1852 *La Dame aux Camélias*, the first great comedy of manners to be produced on the French stage in the 19th century, and he subsequently wrote a dozen plays, the signal success of which was frequently due, in part, to the scandal they created.

Dumas is a dramatist of consummate skill, possessed of the driving power that carries along the action to the catastrophe through a series of dramatic incidents. His dialogues teem with sparkling wit, with arresting formulas and effective sallies. It must be acknowledged, however, that his concern for the thesis to be demonstrated detracts from the realistic merit of his plays,

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while it imposes too rigorous a logic upon the working out of the plot and imparts an abstract and symbolical character to some of the personages (e. g. the heroines of *La Femme de Claude*, 1873; *L'Etrangère*, 1876; *La Princesse de Bagdad*, 1882); upon others again are foisted "argumentative" parts, too visibly intended to voice the opinions of the author (Olivier de Jalin, in *Le Demi-Monde*; de Ryons, in *L'ami des Femmes*; Lebonnard, in *La Visite de Noces*; Rémonin, in *L'Etrangère*). It is to be regretted that some of his ideas, perfectly just in themselves, lead him at times to absurd or even monstrous conclusions (as regards the conditions of married life, for instance), and that the author's moral intentions are conveyed by means of pictures of excessive bold-



ALEXANDRE DUMAS THE YOUNGER

After a portrait painted by Meissonnier (Luxembourg Museum).

Emile Augier (1820-1889) is an accomplished representative of the bourgeois spirit in its most solid and healthy aspects. His dominating faculty is common-sense, with all its attendant insight, judgment and also narrowness of views. He has portrayed the French middle classes, as they were towards the middle of the 19th century. His ethics are sound; his spirit in the very

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best French tradition. Augier had begun, from 1844 to 1853, by writing fanciful comedies and plays in verse. *La Dame aux Camélias* came as a revelation to him, showing him what the comedy of manners should really be. At his first attempt, he surpassed Dumas by writing, *Le gendre de M. Poirier*, (1854), one of the masterpieces of the contemporary drama. This play was followed up by half-a-dozen other comedies of manners also of excellent quality, among which are worthy of mention *Les Lionnes pauvres* (1858) and *Maître Guérin* (1864). In *Les Effrontés* (1861), *Le fils de Giboyer* (1862), *Lions et Renard* (1869), Augier approaches the subject of social and political satire. His final productions, *Madame Caverlet* (1876), *Les Fourchambault* (1878) are plays with a purpose. The whole of his work is both lifelike and dramatic.

By the side of Dumas and Augier, a number of minor dramatic authors produced interesting plays during the same period. **Victorien Sardou** (1831-1908) was successful in every branch, thanks to the suppleness of his mind, his fertile invention and his wonderful mastery of scenic effect. He wrote comedies of manners : *Nos Intimes* (1861), *La Famille Benoiton* (1865), *Nos bons Villageois* (1866); historical dramas : *Patrie* (1869), *La Haine* (1875), *La Sorcière* (1903); and vaudevilles : *Divorçons* (1883).

Edouard Pailleron (1834-1899) made one of the foremost hits of the period by means of a witty satire of the Academical salons. *Le Monde où l'on s'ennuie* (1881). Eugène Labiche raised the vaudeville to the level of fanciful comedy in *Un Chapeau de paille d'Italie* (1851) and *Le Voyage de M. Perrichon* (1869) and in so many other plays in which sound common-sense underlies his mirth, while his light-hearted foolery does not exclude a certain knowledge of the human heart. **Meilhac** (1832-1897) and **Halévy** (1834-1908) gave unbounded amusement to their contemporaries, during the latter years of the Second Empire, with their operettas : *La Belle Hélène* (1866), *La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein* (1867), *Les Brigands* (1870), set to music by Offenbach, and affording a most entertaining combination of buffoonery, observation and fancy. Out of these same elements they compounded a novel style of production, the Parisian comedy, amusing more especially by their topical pungency, their spirited dialogue and smiling irony — the very "wit of the boulevards".

Eventually naturalism passed from the novel to the stage with **Henry Becque** (1837-1899). His two foremost productions *Les Corbeaux* (1882) and *La Parisienne* (1885) set up as a contrast to the light-hearted mirth and optimism of the contemporary drama the most sombre pessimism. To him modern society appears as compounded of knaves and fools. This new movement lasted for some ten years, thanks to the Théâtre Libre (1887-1895), which was founded by André Antoine, and made a specialty of the coarsest naturalism. In this respect the Théâtre libre exerted a

regrettable influence on the French dramatists of the age. But it brought to light a few writers of original talent: **Georges Ancey** (*L'École des Veufs*), **Emile Fabre** (*L'Argent*), **Henry Céard** (*Les Résignés*), and especially **François de Curel**, of whom we shall have occasion to speak later on, for his dramatic writings transcend the bounds of Naturalism and bring us down to a new period. On the other hand the Théâtre Libre contributed to popularise the masterpieces of the foreign drama: Ibsen's plays were acted here for the first time in France, as well as Hauptmann's *Wearers*.

XXV

THE REACTION AGAINST NATURALISM

As early as 1887, after the publication of *La Terre*, by Zola, an open reaction set in against Naturalism. The foremost of the younger adepts of that school ostentatiously broke away from the master. This reaction, which had been brewing for some time, assumed several different shapes.

1. Philosophy, Criticism and History

The great spiritualistic and idealistic tradition of French philosophy was reverted to in the writings of **Emile Boutroux**, (*Essai sur la contingence des lois de la nature*, 1874; *Etudes d'histoire de la philosophie*, 1897); **Henri Bergson** (*Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, 1889; *L'Evolution créatrice*, 1907) and **Henri Poincaré**, (*La Science et l'Hypothèse*, 1902, *La Valeur de la Science*, 1905) who unshackled science from the narrow interpretations and conclusions that some dogmatical spirits had sought to draw from it as against certain moral and religious ideas, notably the theory of free will and the existence of human morality. History likewise assumed a keener spirit of enquiry as regards the rôle of the individual, and turned with a more feeling sympathy towards the outstanding figures of the national history (**Gabriel Hanotaux**: *Histoire du Cardinal de Richelieu*, 1893-1896; *Vie de Jeanne d'Arc*; **Frédéric Masson**: *Napoléon inconnu*, 1895, *Napoléon et sa famille*, 1887-1920, and a number of other books on the same "hero" and, generally, on the *Premier Empire*; **Camille Jullian**: *Vercingétorix*; *La Gaule romaine*, 7 vol.); towards the great hours in that history (**Henry Houssaye**: (1814-1815); or towards religious history) (**Georges Goyau**: *L'Allemagne religieuse*, 7 vol.; *Une Ville-Eglise*; *Genève*, 2 vol.; **Vicomte de La Gorce**, *Histoire du Second Empire*, 6 vol.).

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As regards criticism, the reaction combated the immorality or the unmorality of naturalism, with **Edmond Schérer** (1815-1889, *Etudes sur la littérature contemporaine*) and especially **Ferdinand Brunetière** (1849-1906) who led the campaign against the school of Zola in *Le Roman naturaliste* (1883), nor ceased for twenty-five years to defend the moral ideas and to uphold the rules of good taste. He fights in the first place in

the name of morality, but also in the name of the true literary principles as against the doctrine of art for art's sake, expounds with luminous logic the course of the development of French literature and, by showing how the latter reached its point of perfection in the age of Louis XIV and Bossuet, stands up as the champion of the classical tradition.

The same tradition is defended also, with less bitterness and oratorical power, but with greater suppleness and a freer fancy, by **Jules Lemaitre** (1853-1914) whose critical work, mutable as it may appear, is in reality very firm and solid.

In *Les Contemporains* (7 series, 1885-1899) and *Impressions de théâtre* (10 series, 1888-98) Lemaître has

left us shrewd and spirited impressions of the writers of his age, rendered with unbounded suppleness, charm and fancy. These impressions at times acquire the value of a final judgment.

Anatole France, in the four volumes of *La Vie littéraire* (1887-1893), has likewise produced models of impressionist criticism, in which however pure dilettantism alone finds expression. In the same dilettantism, the same taste for facile, amiable, well-informed and philosophical causerie, lies the charm of his novels, which are scarcely nove's, but rather free remarks, ironical and malicious, upon the fleeting nature of

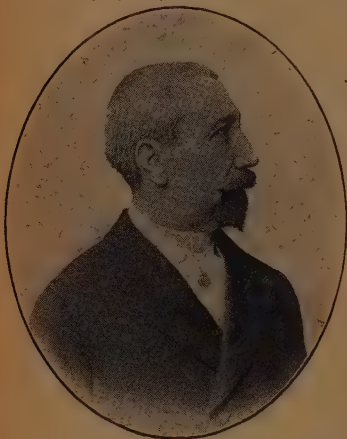


Photo Benque.

ANATOLE FRANCE

After a photograph.

The Reaction against Naturalism.

things in general, the dreams and beliefs that succeed and destroy one another. (*Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard*, 1881; *Le livre de mon ami*, 1885; *Les Opinions de Jérôme Coignard*, 1893; *Le Mannequin d'osier et l'Orme du mail*, 1897; *L'Anneau d'améthyste*, 1899.) Anatole France is an exquisite writer.

Émile Faguet (1847-1916) chiefly devoted his effort to writing monographs of the great masters of French thought. The four volumes of the series *Les Grands Maîtres de la littérature française*, dealing with the last four centuries, and his *Politiques et Moralistes* (1891-1900) are remarkable for their power of analysis and wealth of personal ideas. As opposed to the physiological method of Naturalism, his critical studies mark the reaction of the sense of psychology and a taste for mental analysis, instead of being content with the study of physiological functions. **René Doumic**, follows up with praiseworthy independence the best tradition of French literary criticism, combining the sense of psychology, the moral sense and good taste.

2. The Novel

The same reaction against physiology is apparent in the psychological novel, as written by **Paul Bourget** (born in 1852). The success obtained by **Amiel's Journal intime** (1883), a masterpiece of delicate and sorrowful psychology published two years after that writer's death, had already borne witness to the awakening taste for moral analysis. After publishing two volumes of criticism, dealing with certain moral conditions of his generation, studied in the productions of great writers (*Essais* and *Nouveaux Essais de psychologie contemporaine*, 1883-1885), **Paul Bourget** wrote, from 1885 to 1893, a number of novels in which the enquiring spirit of the analyst does not preclude a deep sympathy for human suffering, nor ever keener and keener moral considerations. These qualities constitute the poignant interest of *Le Disciple* (1889). With *L'Étape* (1902), *Un Divorce* (1904), *L'Émigré* (1907), *Le Démon de Midi* (1914) *Le Sens de la mort* (1915), *Némésis* (1918), the author's talent, strengthening and broadening out, approaches, with a very lofty preoccupation with the moral consequences of certain theories, the study of the problems of contemporary society.

Maurice Barrès (born in 1862) started out from the most individual psychological analysis in the trilogy he devoted to "the cult of the ego": *Sous l'œil des barbares* (1888), *Un homme libre* (1890), *Le Jardin de Bérénice* (1891), works of great subtlety and by no means easy to read, but rich in impressions and meditations. Nor was it long before he discovered in his own "ego" something transcendental, viz. the influence of his native soil and tradition. From 1892 to 1902, he published a further trilogy *Le Roman de l'énergie nationale*, in which — more particularly

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in *Leurs Figures* — he drew some powerful pictures of French politics at the end of last century. His form, relieved of its complications, had reached a degree of sobriety, clearness and force which, together with the most graceful refinement and at times the most penetrating spirit of poetry, make of Maurice Barrès



Photo Crevaux.

MAURICE BARRÈS

Portrait by Jacques-Emile Blanche.

the greatest French prose writer of the present day.

Just before Maurice Barrès, **Pierre Loti** (born in 1850), a naval officer whose actual name is Julien Viaud, had produced his first work. He is the representative of the exotic novel, into which he introduces his sensations and remembrances, all the picturesque impressions and melancholy disillusionment of his wandering life. He is one of the greatest word-painters in the whole range of French literature, possessed of greater vivacity, freshness and brilliance, as well as of a

higher degree of naturalness and spontaneity, than Chateaubriand himself. His *Roman d'un Spahi* (1881) and *Pêcheur d'Islande* (1880) are undoubtedly to be reckoned among the masterpieces of contemporary French literature.

René Bazin, born in 1853, has painted with exquisite art the scenery of his native province of Anjou and of its close neighbour, the Vendée. He too is a writer of rustic novels (*La Terre qui meurt*, 1899; *Le Blé qui lève* (1907)). He further

The Reaction against Naturalism.

wrote a fine book on Alsace (*Les Oberlé*, 1901), and some pathetic tales (*De toute son âme*, 1897; *Donatienne*, 1902; *L'Isolée*, 1905), the realism of which is impregnated through and through with moral delicacy of feeling and the milk of human kindness.

Edouard Rod (1857-1913), who in the early productions of his twentieth year had not been immune from the naturalistic taint, shook himself free from this as far back as *La Course à la mort* (1885), and composed a score of novels, in which he analyses the soul of his contemporaries with keen penetration, and discusses the most disquieting questions of the present age: *Le Sens de la Vie* (1889), *La Vie privée de Michel Teissier* (1892), *Le Silence* (1894), *Les Roches blanches* (1895), *L'Indocile* (1905).

Paul Margueritte (1860-1919), one of those who signed the manifesto intimating the break with Zola, borrowed from Naturalism the scrupulous observation of reality, to which however he superadded the sense of the inner life (*Jours d'épreuve*, 1887; *La Force des choses*, 1892; *La Tourmente*, 1893). In collaboration with his brother, **Victor Margueritte**, he produced a general synopsis in four volumes of the tragical events of 1870-1871: *Le Désastre* (1898), *Les Tronçons du glaive* (1901), *Les Braves gens* (1901), *La Commune* (1901).

Paul Hervieu (1857-1915), after publishing four or five novels, powerful and biting presentments of the upper classes, turned his attention to the writing of plays. **Marcel Prévost** (*Le Scorpion*, 1887; *L'Automne d'une femme*, 1893; *Les Vierges fortes*, 1900); **Paul Adam** (*La Force du mal*, *Les Cœurs nouveaux*, 1896; *Le Serpent noir*, 1905); **Edouard Estaunié** (*L'Empreinte*, 1895; *Le Serment*, 1899; *L'Épave*, 1902; *La Vie secrète*, 1908); **Mme Marcelle Tinayre** (*La Maison du péché*, 1902; *La Rebelle*, 1905; *L'Ombre de l'Amour*, 1909); **Romain Rolland** (*Jean-Christophe*); **Abel Hermant** (*La Carrière*, 1894; *Le Faubourg*, 1900) have analysed the hearts and consciences of their age, or depicted its manners, in novels that have brought them celebrity and success.

The best of the novels by **J.-H. Rosny** (the joint pseudonym of the brothers Joseph-Henri and Séraphin-Justin Boex) have propounded the most topical social and moral problems with a keen sense of life and a genuine sympathy for those who suffer (*Nell Horn*, 1886; *Le Bilatéral*, 1887; *L'Indomptable*, 1894); while in their prehistorical novels (*Les Xipéhuz*, 1897; *Vamireh*, 1892), these prolific and learned writers present an epic vision of the primitive ages.

3. The Drama

In the drama, also, psychology is to the fore with **Jules Lemaitre** of whom mention has already been made as a critic (*Révolte*, 1880; *Mariage blanc*, 1891; *Le Pardon*, 1895) and **Paul Hervieu** (*Les Tenailles*, 1895; *La Loi de l'homme*, 1897; *La Course*

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du Flambeau, his masterpiece, 1901), **M. François de Curel**, in *L'Envers d'une sainte* (1892); *Les Fossiles* (1892); *La Nouvelle Idole*, 1895; *Le repas du Lion*, 1897) has presented on the stage studies of individual and social psychology that are conspicuously powerful and new, and in which he propounds and discusses ideas in a dramatic form without troubling about the habits of the



A SCENE FROM THE FIRST ACT OF CYRANO DE BERGERAC

Illustration taken from P. Lafitte's edition.

public, nor the minor tricks of the craftsman, nor even, at times, the requirements of the theatre. **M. Georges de Porto-Riche** (*Amoureuse*, 1891; *Le Passé*, 1897; *Le Vieil Homme*, 1910) is a painter of sexual love, with its feverish elements and its sufferings. But here the physiology of the naturalistic school underlies the psychology.

Eugène Brieux has produced since 1892 some dozen plays, all of which belong to social comedy: *Blanchette* (1893), *La Robe rouge* (1900). So strong is the current of the age that **Henri Lavedan**, **Maurice Donnay** and **Alfred Capus**, themselves continuators of the Parisian comedy, while infusing it each with

his own spirit and personal qualities, make it tend more and more to the study of social problems.

But the keenest and most marked reaction against Naturalism in the drama was that constituted by the play of **M. Edmond Rostand** (1868-1919), *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1897). This has been, perhaps, the most successful production of the 19th century, and the triumphant success, of this play, alternately heroic and tender, spirited and melancholy, affords the most striking testimony to the persistence of the old traditional character of the French people, compounded of bravery and good temper, generous sentiments and a fondness for fine speeches and noble deeds. *L'Aiglon* (1900) and *Chantecler* (1910), by the same author, also met with a brilliant reception though not to the same extent.

4. Poetry : Symbolism.

It was in poetry, however, that the most radical innovations were made. The very perfection reached by the Parnassians in the art of writing verses gave birth to a movement that became clearly defined towards 1885. De Vigny and Lamartine were then restored to public favour, while young and combative reviews declared war upon the tradition of French poetry and clamoured for a freer verse, more supple and more musical, that should be less concerned with rendering the outward appearance of

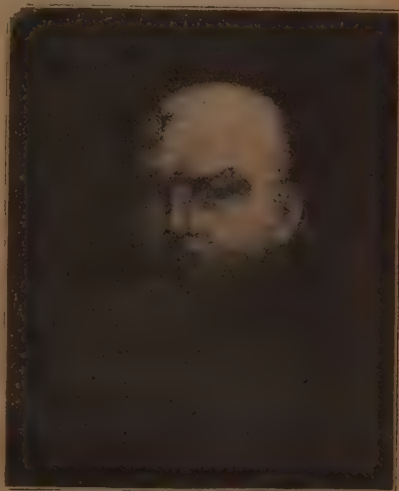


Photo Hachette

FIGURE

After the portrait painted by Eugène Carrière (1891).

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things, but should allow freer scope to fancy and mystery. The "symbolistic" poets represent this tendency; but their theories are unsettled, sometimes carried to the verge of a challenge to common-sense as is also the obscurity of their works. They have played fast and loose with language and metre.

At first they gathered round **Paul Verlaine** (1844-1896), a seceder from the Parnasse. A genuine, and at times a great poet, he allows his diseased sensibility to range from unconscious cynicism to the suavest mystical religiousness. There are some admirable passages in his *Poèmes saturniens* (1866), his *Romances sans paroles* (1874), and above all in *Sagesse* (1885) and *Jadis et Naguère* (1885).

But the High Priest and theorician of symbolism was **Stéphane Mallarmé** (1842-1898). An exquisite talker possessed of a brilliant though paradoxical turn of mind, his mistake was that in verse as in prose he systematically banished clearness and precision from his works (*L'après-midi d'un Faune*, 1876; *Poésies complètes*, 1888).

The chief representatives of this literary school are : **Arthur Rimbaud** (1854-1891) : *Une Saison en Enfer*, 1873; *Les Illuminations*, 1886; **Jean Moréas** (1856-1914) : *Les Syrtes*, 1884; *Les Cantilènes*, 1886; *Le Pélerin passionné*, 1891; *Les Stances*, 1898-1901. **Jules Laforgue** (1860-1887); *Les Complaintes*, 1885; *L'imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune*, 1886; **Francis Vielé-Griffin** (born at Norfolk, U. S. A., 1864); *Poèmes et Poésies* [1888-1893], 1895. -

More or less closely connected with symbolism, the best poets of this period, those who refrained from upsetting the language and the metre, are **Henri de Régnier**, born in 1864 (*Poems* [1887-1892], 1896; *Les Jeux rustiques et divins*, 1897; *Les Médailles d'argile*, 1900; *La Cité des eaux*, 1902), who infused into French poetry all that it could be expected to receive from symbolism, viz. a somewhat suppler rhythm and a more lively feeling of the mutability of things; — **Albert Samain** (1859-1900), whose melancholy lyricism finds expression in poems of dainty loftiness (*Au Jardin de l'Infante*, 1893; *Aux Flancs du vase*, 1898); — **Charles Guérin** (1873-1905), whose untimely end cut short the promise of a deep and impassioned poet (*Le Cœur solitaire*, 1898; *L'Homme intérieur*, 1905); — **Eugène Hollande** whose philosophical inspiration has in itself something secret and austere (*Beauté*, 1892; *La Cité Future*, 1903; *La Vie passe*, 1909); — **Francis Jammes** (*De l'Angelus de l'Aube à l'Angelus du Soir*, 1898; *Géorgiques chrétiennes*, 1914) and three Belgian poets : **George Rodenbach** (*Le Règne du Silence*, 1891); **Emmanuel Verhaeren** (*Les Villes tentaculaires*, 1895), **Maurice Maeterlinck** (*Serres chaudes*, 1889).

It is no easy matter to characterise in open words the complex

originality of **Paul Claudel** (born in 1865), in whose work (*L'Arbre; Tête d'or; L'Annonce faite à Marie*), a powerful current of poetry, an abundance of novel images and moral touches of exquisite delicacy are mixed up with such headlong verbosity and obscure symbolism that one feels inclined to wonder if in the whole of this production there is anything referible to the tradition of French literature.

5. Conclusion. The Present and the Future.

It were vain to attempt to write the history of the present. As far as it is possible at least to indicate certain tendencies, we will conclude by trying to definite the stage of its development reached by French literature.

Poetry would seem to tend, as regards its form, to an attenuated traditionalism, with a certain relaxing of the old technique, and as regards its subject-matter, towards an as yet somewhat undefined synthesis of romanticism, naturalism and symbolism, as in the poems of **Fernand Gregh** (*La Maison de l'Enfance*, 1897; *Prélude féérique*, 1909); and **Comtesse de Noailles** (*Le Cœur innombrable*, 1901; *L'Ombre des jours*, 1902; *Poèmes de la Vie et de la Mort*, 1916).

As regards the novel, **Louis Bertrand**, **René Boylesve**, **Henry Bordeaux** are brilliant continuators of the French tradition, which is to exploit the rich field of moral and psychological life.

Louis Bertrand (born in 1866), who excels in telling us of all that he has seen and heard in the course of his journeyings through the Mediterranean world (*La Grèce du soleil et des paysages, Le Mirage oriental*, 1910), has made that world the subject of his novels, skilful as he is in depicting its present reality (*Le Sang des races*, 1899; *L'Invasion*, 1908) and calling up its past existence (*Saint Augustin*, 1913; *Sanguis martyrum*, 1918).

René Boylesve (born in 1867) portrays provincial life with a spicy mixture of grace, irony and picturesqueness (*Mademoiselle Cloque*, 1899; *La Becquée*, 1901; *L'Enfant à la Balustrade*, 1903).

Henry Bordeaux (born in 1870) deals with the pathos of family life in a series of novels for which the dramatic interest of their subjects and the moral lessons to be derived from them have earned conspicuous success (*La Peur de vivre*, 1902; *Les Roquevillard*, 1906; *La Croisée des chemins*, 1909).

Standing somewhat apart and isolated as it were in his complex originality, **André Gide** (born in 1869) is a writer of subtle penetration who, after undergoing the influence of symbolism (*Le Voyage d'Urien*, 1893, *Les Nourritures terrestres*, 1897), strives to revert to classical purity. He is much addicted to the portrayal of exceptional situations and characters of overstrained refinement (*L'Immoraliste*, 1903; *La Porte étroite*, 1907; *Isabelle*, 1911).

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Some of the best novels of the last years have been distinguished by the *Académie française* (*concours pour le Prix National de Littérature*), by the *Académie Goncourt*, and by the Prize commissions of *La Vie heureuse*, — the magazine published by the Librairie Hachette, *Le Retour de Jérusalem*, by **Myriam Harry**, 1904; *La Maternelle*, by **Léon Frapié**, 1904; *Princesses de Science*, by **Colette Yver**, 1907; *Le Reste est silence*, by **Edmond Jaloux**, 1909; *Le Roman du malade*, by **Louis de Robert**, 1911; *M. des Lourdines*, by **A. de Chateaubriand**; *L'Elève Gilles*, by **Ernest Lafon**, 1911; *Le Serviteur*, by **Henri Bachelin**, 1915; *Dingley l'illustre écrivain*; *l'Ombre de la Croix*, by **Jérôme et Jean Tharaud**; *Les Croix de Bois*, by **Roland Dorgès**, 1919; *L'Atlantide*, by **Pierre Benoît**, 1919; *L'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*, by **Marcel Proust**, 1919, etc.

The théâtre, which has become commercialised, has not yet been productive of new talents, if, as we think, literature has not much to do with the sensational and successful plays of such dramatists as **Henry Bataille** and **Henry Bernstein**.

Criticism, gravely jeopardised by the paid advertisements of the newspapers and the even more important part given by them to the contributions of the reporters, is brilliantly sustained in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* by **André Beaunier**, himself a most talented writer, displaying in his novels a shrewd and ironical observation. **Paul Souday** in *Le Temps*, **Jean de Pierrefeu** in *Le Journal des Débats* and **Lucien Maury** in *La Revue Bleue* review the new books with a keen critical sense. The example of **Ferdinand Brunetière** (*Études critiques sur l'histoire de la Littérature française*, 1880 et suiv., 8 volumes), *Époques du théâtre français* and *L'Évolution des Genres*) has been followed. **Gustave Lanson's** *Histoire de la Littérature française*, and **J. J. Jusserand's** *Histoire littéraire du peuple anglais* are masterpieces of moral history as well as of criticism. With **Victor Giraud** (*Les maîtres de l'heure*, 1st series 1911; 2nd series 1914), the criticism of the contemporaries almost merges into literary history, whose a model is given, as regards the old times of our national and popular life, in the most remarkable work of **Joseph Bédier**, *Les Légendes épiques*, 1908-19, while in the case of **F. Strowski's** *Saint François de Sales* (1898). *Pascal et son temps* (1907-08; 3 vol.), **Alfred Rébelliau's** *Bossuet, historien du Protestantisme*, 1892, and **Henri Brémond's**, *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France*, 1915 and after, 2 vol., literary and moral history themselves are expanded in such a way as to include the philosophical ideas and religious feelings. The history of art is connected with the history of religious thought and feelings and theological literature in the highly valuable books: *L'Art religieux du XIII^e siècle en France* (1898), *L'Art religieux de la fin du moyen âge en France* (1908), by **Emile Mâle**.

The great tradition of political journalism, as exemplified by Louis Veuillot and Prévost-Paradol, is now represented by **Charles Maurras**, who, in a doctrinal newspaper (*L'Action Française*), applies to the criticism of manners and institutions, to the discussion of ideas, his remarkably vigorous mind, his rare power as a dialectician and his qualities as a writer, as manifested also in his books: *Les Amants de Venise: George Sand et Musset* (1902), *L'Avenir de l'Intelligence* (1905), *L'Étang de Berre* (1916).

History, which tends more and more to branch off from literature proper towards erudition or the arraying of documents, adheres to the best French tradition in the fine books of **Louis Madelin** (*La Rome de Napoléon*, — *La Révolution*; — *Danton*; — *Les Heures merveilleuses d'Alsace et de Lorraine*, 1919). Impressions of travel abroad, deepened by the observation of manners, the perusal of literary works, and an enquiry into moral, political, social and religious life, constitute a valuable contribution to the study of foreign countries in **André Chevrillon's** *Dans l'Inde* 1891; *Terres mortes*, 1898; *Études anglaises*, 1901; *Sanctuaires et Paysages d'Asie*, 1905; *Fez*, 1906; **Pierre Mille's**, *De Thessalie en Crète*, 1898, *Au Congo belge*, 1899, *Sur la vaste terre*, 1906, and **André Bellessort's** *La Jeune Amérique*, 1899; *La Société japonaise*, 1902; *Les Journées et les Nuits Japonaises*, 1906; *La Suède*, 1911; *Le Nouveau Japon*, 1918. Philosophy inclines towards science, or more correctly speaking towards the sciences: mathematics, biology and sociology. On the whole, the field of literature is narrowed down, curtailed by all that is taken from it on the one hand by the special disciplines and on the other by the commercialisation of journalism and the theatre.

Restricted as it is, however, literature may gain in earnestness what it loses in extent; it tends to assume an ever growing interest in moral, social and religious questions. The great thing is that the form shall not lose in quality. The war of 1914-1918 has demonstrated, not only to France, but to the whole world, the fact that what was threatened was French culture itself. In this the world now takes a greater interest, and France will no doubt feel inclined to watch all the more jealously over this treasure as laid up for her by her literature in the course of that uninterrupted development, which has proceeded for ten centuries.

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